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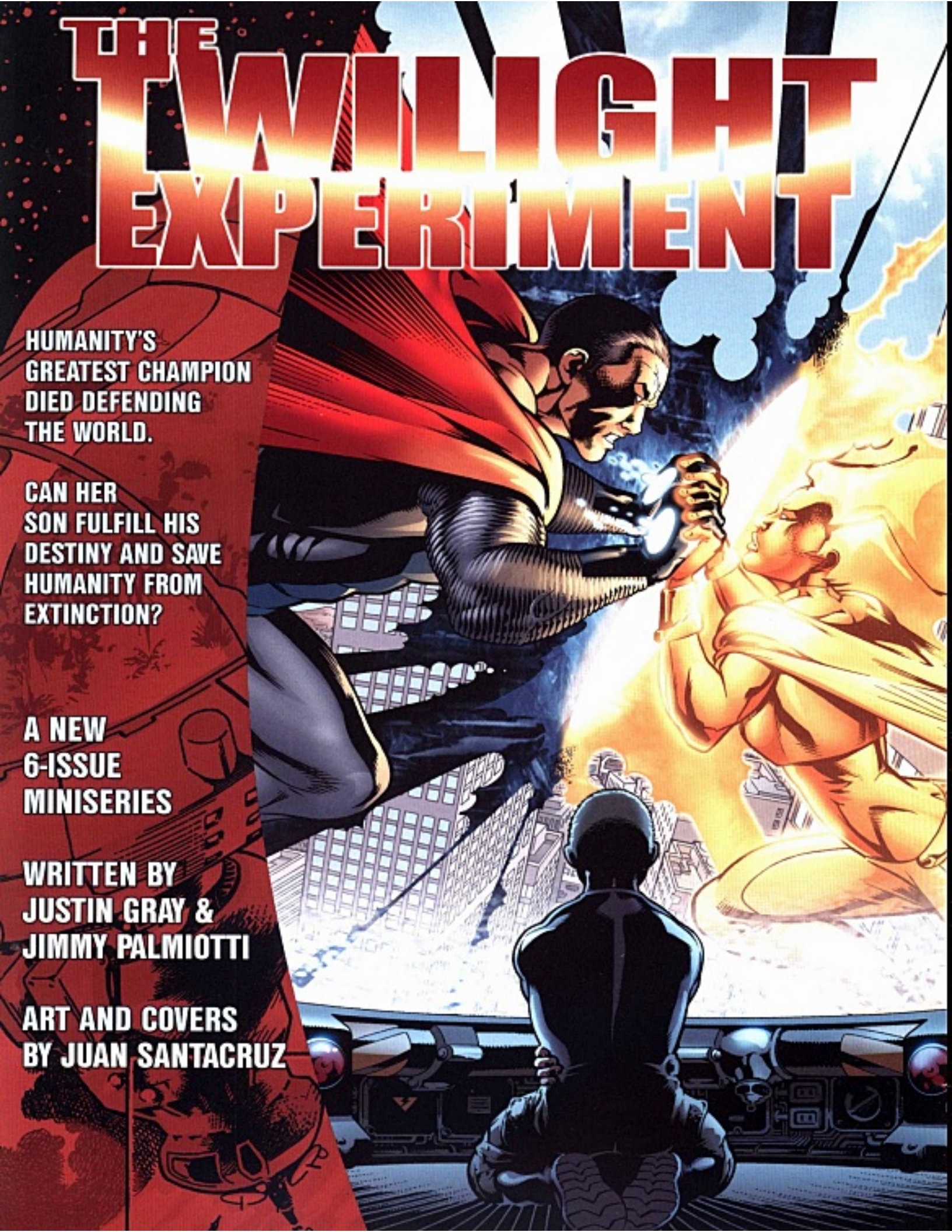

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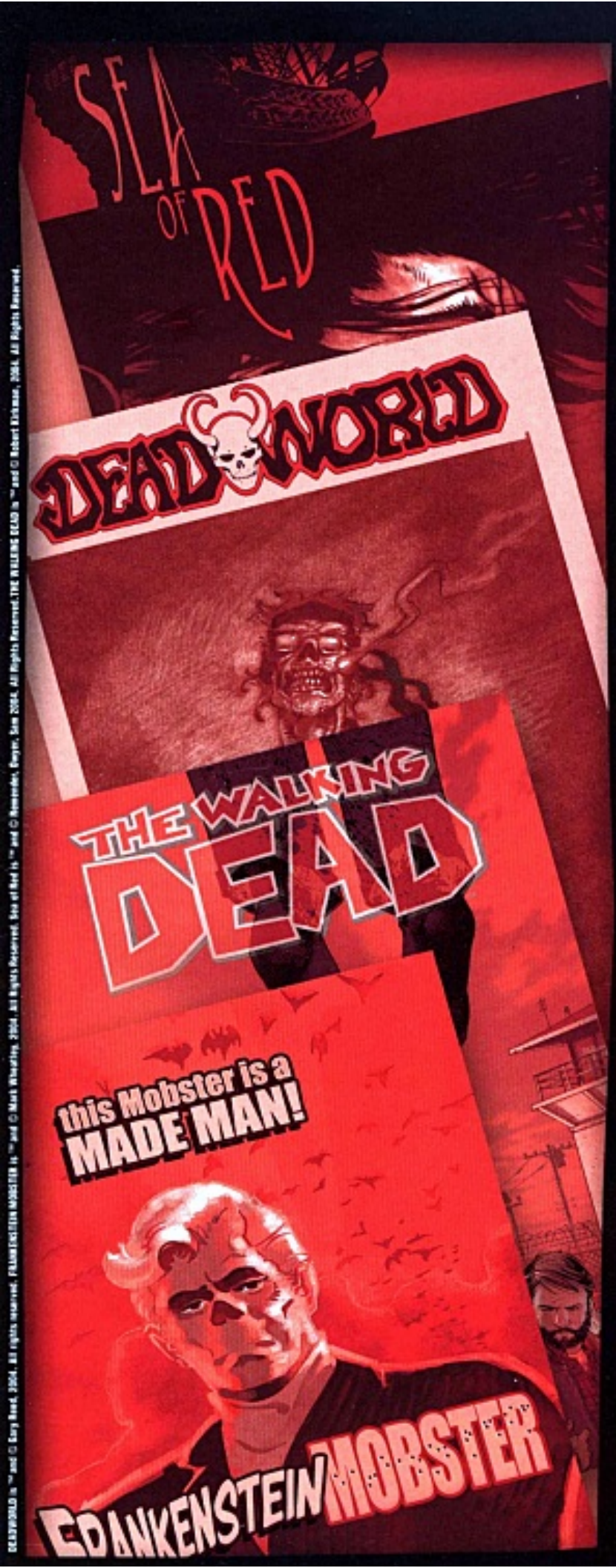

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Find more of Brian Haberlin's *NeoBeauties* on p. 33

BLOODBANK

features

25 CONSTANTINE: THE MOVIE
DJIMON HOUNSOU TAKES YOU BEHIND THE SCENES

28 CONSTANTINE: THE COMICS
FROM MOORE TO ENNIS, WHY THE GREATS LOVE WRITING *HELLBLAZER*

30 SPRING MOVIE PREVIEW
THE SEASON'S CAN'T MISS FLICKS

33 INNER BEAUTIES
BRIAN HABERLIN AND HIS ANGELIC CREATIONS PUSH THE LIMITS

52 GLOOM AND DOOM
BREEHN BURNS: ONE OF THE HOTTEST ARTISTS IN HORROR

comics

13 VAMPIRELLA: SUPERNATURAL LAW
VAMPI ON TRIAL!

46 VAMPIRELLA: WITNESS, PART 2
THE ACTION-PACKED *SWORD OF DRACULA* CROSSOVER CONCLUDES

departments

06 VAMPED
THUS SPAKE VAMPI

08 SCARLET LETTERS
WORDS TO LIVE BY

10 NEWSBITES
SUCCULENT MORSELS FOR YOU

33 NEW BLOOD
YOUR DOORWAY TO THE BEYOND

39 THE VAULT
REVIEWS YOU NEED TO READ

42 FLESH & BLOOD
MEET COMICS' HOTTEST TALENT

56 SUCKERS
BACK INTO THE CUBE

58 LUNA CHICKS
STACY WALKER LIVES THE FANTASY

VAMPIRELLA MAGAZINE #9

COVER CREDITS:
Newsstand Vampirella cover courtesy Warner Brothers

Main illustrated cover by Breehn Burns

Alternate illustrated cover by Tony Harris

Model cover photograph by Lorinda Sullivan
Curtains by Adam Weiss

ART: BRIAN HABERLIN

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY LIONS GATE FILMS

VAMPED

ART BY BRIAN HAEBERLIN

It's the month of love and I hope you've got someone special to spend it with. If not, let me keep you occupied! I promise I won't disappoint. This issue's packed with all sorts of goodies to tickle your every fancy. You like blockbuster movies? Take a gander at our coverage of *Constantine*. This Keanu Reeves fueled epic into hell's based on *Hellblazer*, one of my favorite comics of all time. We talked to award-winning actor Djimon Hounsou who took us behind the scenes.

Looking for your comic fix? Check out the action-packed conclusion of my adventures with *Sword of Dracula*'s Ronnie Van Helsing courtesy Jason Henderson and Greg Scott. Ever wonder what happens when I get into legal trouble? Well *Supernatural Law*'s Wolff & Byrd to the rescue! Our first unforgettable meeting's brought to you by Batton Lash and the good folks at Exhibit A Press (exhibitapress.com).

I love introducing strangers and making new friends, especially the likes of Stacy Walker. She's exactly what I look for in a Lunachick: sexy, driven and ready to take on any challenge—just like me! And be sure to meet Breehn Burns, Rick Spears, Brian Haberlin and all the other hot comic talent we profile in this issue as well!

Finally, let me say a big thank you to Maureen McTigue for everything she did for this issue and everything she's done for me. You're the best.

Vampirella

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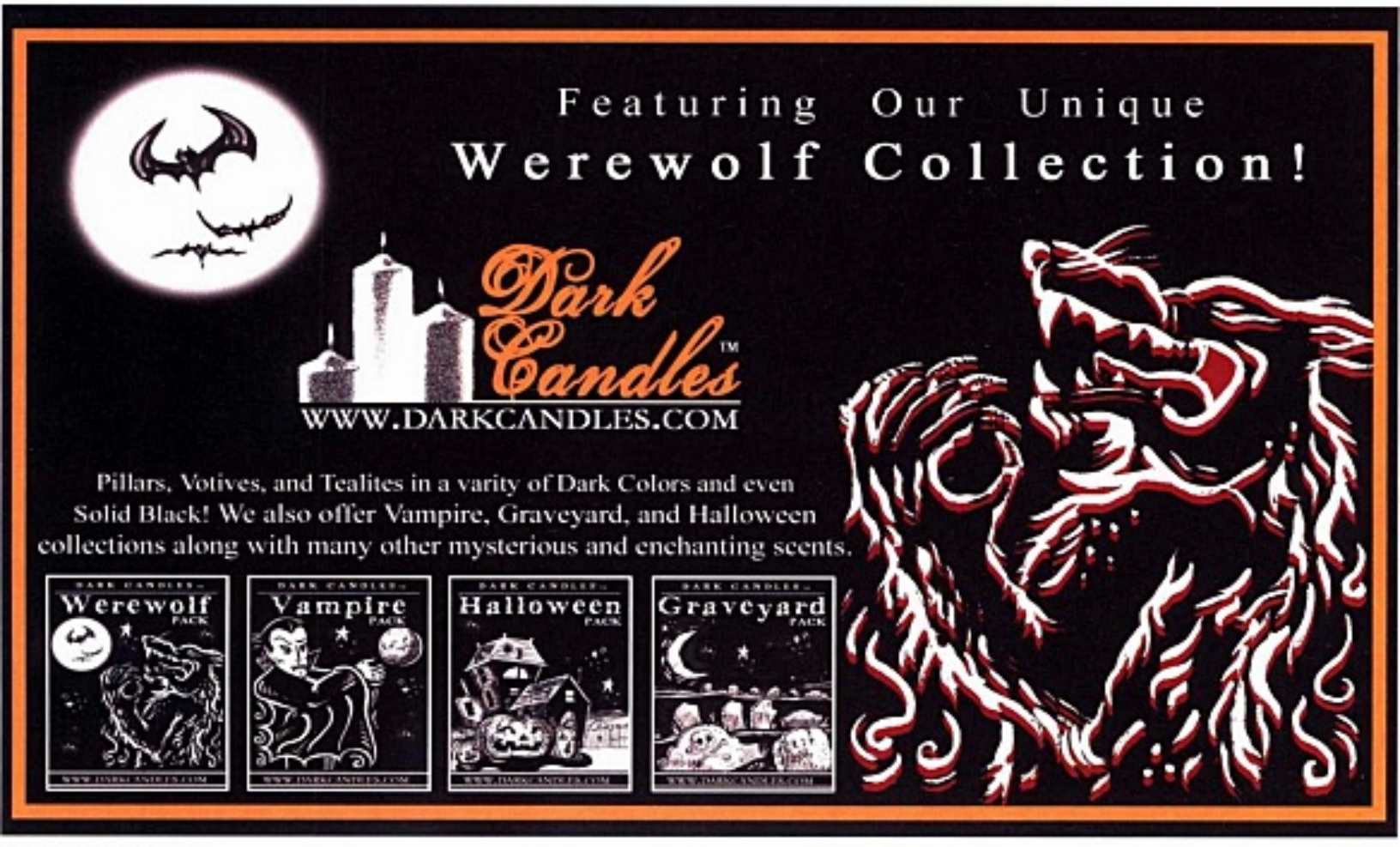
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SCARLET LETTERS

CALLS IN THE DARKNESS

Dear Vampirella,
My boyfriend collects comics and is a huge Vampirella fan. (We have Maria and Kitana posters all over our bedroom walls.)

I just have one question. Why don't comic book heroines have nipples? Occasionally an artist covers just enough to show how cold it is outside, but generally they're just not there. "Kick Start My Heart" from issue #8 is a prime example. While I couldn't fill the costumes of characters like Vampi or the White Queen, I have been generously blessed in this department, and I got to tell you that costume would come a whole lot closer to encircling than covering up if you catch my drift. Hope you've got an answer for me!

Diana Lawder
Miami, FL

A magician doesn't ever reveal his tricks, nor will we reveal Vampirella's. Think of it as one of her special powers! Don't you just love a good mystery?

Dear Scarlet Letters,
I have to say, I really enjoy the way the magazine is going. I love seeing old school b&w stories like in the old days, though occasionally having Vampirella vamp out in living color every now and then would be a treat. Suckers keeps getting funnier and funnier (and BA, I've been to Texas, you went easy on them) and The Vault has been a great resource when I go to the comic shop. I noticed you included Elvira's DVD box set in your gift guide. Any chance we'll see a team-up between Vampirella and the Mistress of the Dark? These two are a match made in heaven. I'm not saying she could ever replace Pantha at Vampi's side, but it would be the makings of a hell of an adventure.

Dave Sillow
Merchantville, NJ

Oh, lay off Texas! But seriously, the Mistress of the Dark and your favorite Drakulonian would make a hell of a tag team! But till then, keep counting on Pantha to watch Vampy's back.

Dear Vampirella,
What is with all the secret agent, *Last Action Hero* stuff? Vampirella is one of the greatest, sexiest horror characters ever and you have her busting into a prison like it's Check Point Charlie. And then, in "Witness," you have her looking on as some vampire gang turf war breaks out. I understand that in this post-*Matrix* world we're living in every one is big on the trench coats and blazing machine guns, but isn't the whole point of vampires that throat ripping and blood sucking are so much more fun?

Carl Farris
Portland, OR

Quench your bloodthirst! We'll be ramping up the blood and guts quota – just you wait!

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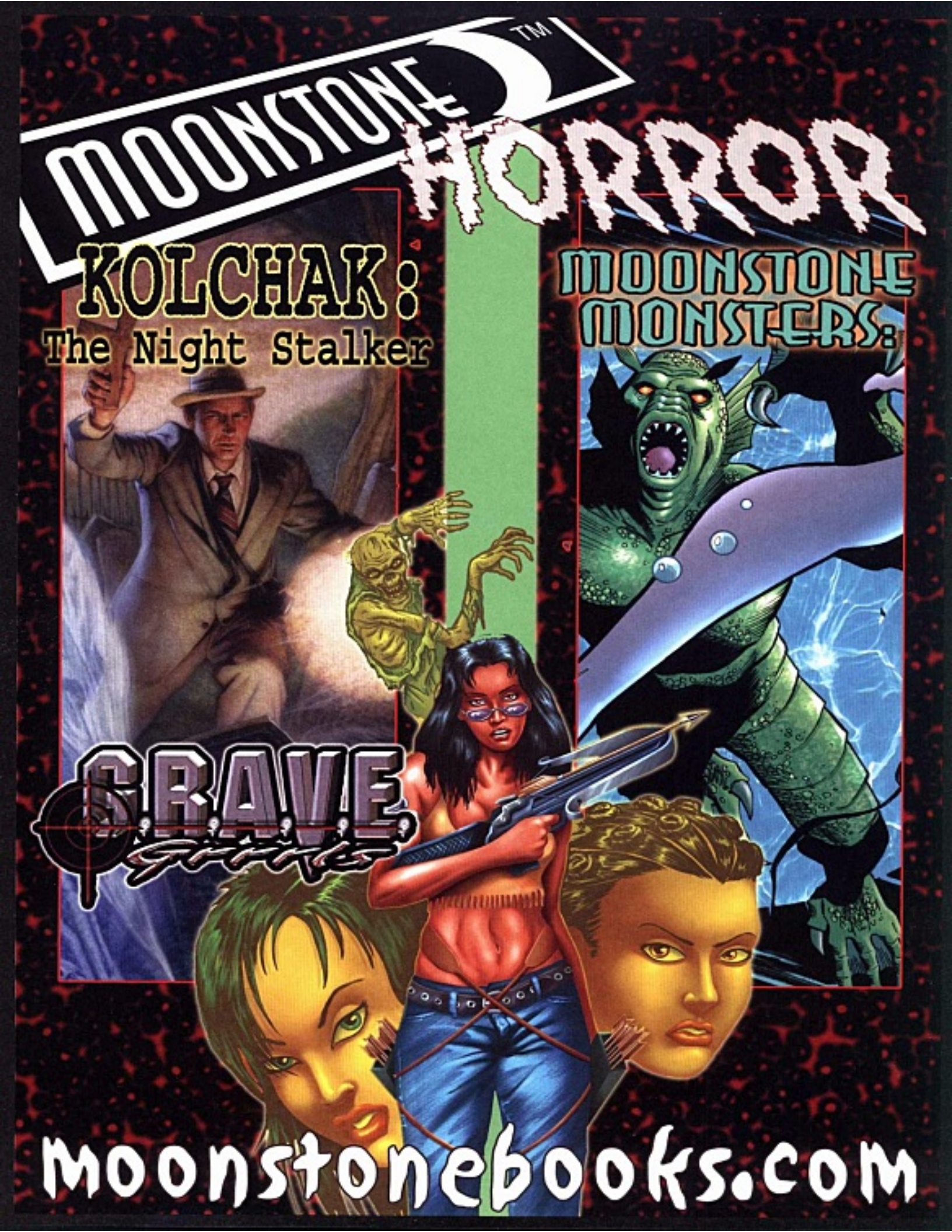
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NEWSBITES

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COMICS PIONEER WILL EISNER DIES

Will Eisner and his wife, Ann

On Monday January 3, 2005 at the age of 87, **Will Eisner** passed away due to complications from open-heart surgery. Will Eisner was born into a family of Jewish immigrants on March 6, 1917 in Brooklyn, New York. As a young man, Eisner found himself inspired by his early life in the tenements, by the tragedies of war, and by the imaginative power of the comic medium.

In 1940, Eisner packaged his strips into a sixteen-page comic book within a newspaper. It was in this strip that *The Spirit* made his debut. Eisner's series became extremely popular due in large part to the experimental and innovative nature of his illustrations.

Later, Eisner began focusing on the potential and possibilities of "sequential art as a storytelling medium." In 1978, Eisner published what, by many, is considered to be the first American graphic novel, *A Contract with God*. As with much of Eisner's later work, *Contract* revealed the human condition with equal parts levity and tragedy.

Will Eisner's influence on the field of comics was both immeasurable and profound. Our condolences go out to Will's wife, Ann, his family, friends and colleagues.

In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation in Will's name to the American Cancer Society – his daughter died of cancer – or the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, which Will was known to have supported. For more information, go to www.willeisner.com.

OVER THE HORIZON: MAM TOR

British comics artist Liam Sharp, along with his wife Christina McCormack-Sharp, have started a new publishing company, **Mam Tor** (www.mamtor.com). Originally meant to support Liam's work alone, the company will broaden its offerings this summer with *Event Horizon*, a stand-alone 120 page anthology. Collecting all-new stories by respected comics veterans as well as rising stars, *Horizon* will serve as a creative outlet for work that may otherwise not have seen print. The site is also currently taking submissions for inclusion in the three additional *Event Horizon* books Mam Tor has planned, giving a rare opportunity for some newcomers to be published alongside the likes of Sharp, Ashley Wood and Chris Weston. (Look for more on the book in the next issue of *Vampirella Magazine*.)

According to its website, the company will bring together the "finest comic, science-fiction and fantasy artists and writers...with the great unknowns to produce the radical and the sublime, the humorous and the horrid." Sharp has gone even further, stating Mam Tor's mission is to simply put out high quality work, regardless of how financially successful the actual publications may be. Digital publishing has made it more cost-effective to produce such books, lowering the concerns for losing huge amounts of money. As they say on their site, "It's a little flourish of anarchic creativity done entirely for the hell of it."

A G.R.A.V.E. THREAT

Moonstone Books will publish the **G.R.A.V.E Grrrls: 'Destroyers of the Dead'** mini-series. A sinister force is resurrecting the dead, infusing them with an appetite for flesh. In their way: a trio of red-hot females turned into living weapons by their government. According to its website (http:// www.moonstonebooks.com/gravegrrrls.asp) *Grrrls* "isn't a horror tale, nor is it a "grrrlie" book. Not a story of espionage, nor a shoot-em-up CGI fest. Not even a sci-fi 'could happen.' It's all that rolled into one...plus a few surprises to boot." Featuring the writing of Scott Licina and the art of Ken Wolak, the book will also feature a cover by none other than the legendary Alex Ross. This March, the three-issue romp begins...and the dead won't know what hit them!

A GIGANTIC DEVELOPMENT

Rick Spears, writer of the hit indie comic series *Teenagers from Mars*, has formed a new publishing venture, **Gigantic Graphic Novels**. The *TFM* trade paperback out this month will be Gigantic's first release, but certainly not its last. (Check out Flesh & Blood for more on *TFM*).

The book gives Gigantic an important launching point. Using lessons learned self-publishing the original *TFM* series, Spears hopes to publish more original graphic novels by himself and others he will bring into the fold. He also hopes Gigantic's success isn't limited to comic shops. He's already signed an exclusive agreement with Publishers Group West (PGW) for distribution. "Where people had to fight to find copies of [*TFM*] before now," says Spears, "with PGW they will be able to find the trade in any of the major book chains, online at Amazon or even at their local specialty bookstore." Forthcoming releases by Gigantic include *Dead West*, by Spears and Rob G to be published in June. The highly anticipated sequel to *TFM, Curse of the Teenagers from Mars*, is expected to be released by Gigantic sometime in 2006. For more information visit www.giganticgraphicnovels.com.

WILL AND ANN EISNER: COURTESY THE CBLDF. THE SPIRIT © AND ™ WILL EISNER STUDIOS. MAM TOR: COURTESY LIAM SHARP. TEENAGERS FROM MARS: COURTESY RICK SPEARS. G.R.A.V.E. GRRRLS ART BY ALEX ROSS

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People v. Vampirella

STORY AND ART: BATTON LASH • Art Assists: Melissa Uran and Trevor Nielson

A Performance to Bewitch and Bedevil You
The Great Pendragon with Vampirella
BEWARE THE CREATURES OF THE NIGHT-- THEY HAVE LAWYERS!
ALANNA WOLFF AND JEFF BYRD ARE ATTORNEYS WHO SPECIALIZE IN A VERY PARTICULAR FIELD OF LAW: THE SUPERNATURAL! SO WHEN THE LAW FIRM OF WOLFF & BYRD, COUNSELORS OF THE MACABRE HEARD THAT THE LEGENDARY MAID OF DRAKULON WAS INCARCERATED, THEY LEAPED TO HER DEFENSE. NEVERTHELESS, THEY WERE QUITE SURPRISED TO LEARN WHAT THIS VAMPIRE WAS CHARGED WITH . . .

Supernatural Law and Wolff & Byrd, Counselors of the Macabre are © and ™ 2005 by Batton Lash

HAPPY HOUR IN THE SMALL UPSTATE NEW YORK TOWN OF GOODWIN HEIGHTS:
AHEM. COUNSELORS, THIS TOWN WAS OUR LAST BOOKING BEFORE MY LOVELY ASSISTANT AND I WERE TO EMBARK ON A EUROPEAN TOUR . . .
. . . BUT I CERTAINLY DIDN'T EXPECT VAMPIRELLA TO BE BOOKED IN THE CITY JAIL!
WE GOT HERE AS QUICKLY AS WE COULD, SINCE YOU SAID TIME WAS OF THE ESSENCE, MR. PENDRAGON
DID VAMPIRELLA BITE SOMEBODY? MESMERIZE SOMEONE AGAINST THEIR WILL--?
HEAVENS, NO! HOWEVER . . .
VAMPIRELLA NEEDS TO INGEST A BLOOD-SUBSTITUTE SERUM EVERY 24 HOURS TO SLAKE HER THIRST FOR HUMAN BLOOD
AND SHE'S BEEN DEPRIVED OF THE SERUM SINCE SHE WAS JAILED YESTERDAY!!
THEN WE SHOULD SEE HER ASAP
Y'KNOW-- I USED TO READ ABOUT VAMPIRELLA WHEN I WAS A TEEN . . .
SO ALL THAT STUFF ABOUT HER COMING FROM THE PLANET DRAKULON AND THE RIVERS OF BLOOD IS TRUE--?
QUITE, MR. BYRD! SAD TO SAY, THE DEAR GIRL HAS A DEPENDENCY PROBLEM.
SO, WHAT HAS SHE BEEN CHARGED WITH?
PUBLIC INDECENCY!
THE DO-GOODERS IN THIS TOWN ARE ENOUGH TO DRIVE A SOUL TO DRINK!

SOON . . .
SHE'S ALL YOURS, COUNSELORS
MS. VAMPIRELLA? HI-- I'M ALANNA WOLFF, AND THIS IS MY PARTNER, JEFF BYRD
WE'RE YOUR LAWYERS
W- WHERE'S PENDY--?
PLEASE . . . GO. YOU-- YOU DON'T KNOW THE DANGER YOU'RE IN . . .
"PENDY" TOLD US ABOUT YOUR CONDITION. HE'S WAITING OUTSIDE . . .
WE'VE ARRANGED FOR YOU TO BE RELEASED ON BAIL . . .
BUT FIRST, YOU MUST TAKE CARE OF SOMETHING . . .
DRINK UP!
WE'RE FORTUNATE NO ONE RECOGNIZED HER AS A BONA FIDE VAMPIRE
IT'S TOUGH TO GET A RESTRAINING ORDER AGAINST THOSE STAKE-THROUGH-THE-HEART TYPES
AHHH
STILL, THE IMPRESSION I GET FROM THIS TOWN . . .
. . . IS THAT THIS MIGHT BE FAR MORE THREATENING!

But at the bail hearing,* questions are raised about Vampirella's release . . .

*excerpts from the official transcript

YOUR HONOR, THE DEFENDANT WAS ARRESTED BECAUSE HER LEWD DISPLAY WAS CORRUPTING THE MORALS OF THE POPULACE
JUDGE SUTTON, MY CLIENT TRAVELS THE WORLD AS THE ASSISTANT TO RENOWNED ILLUSIONIST MORDECAI PENDRAGON.
ODD, ISN'T IT, THAT IN ALL HER TRAVELS, ONLY ONE PROSECUTOR-- COINCIDENTALLY ONE RUNNING FOR RE-ELECTION--HAS CONSIDERED HER PERFORMANCE INDECENT?
MR. BRENNAN, MS. WOLFF . . . MAY I REMIND YOU THAT THIS IS AN ARRAIGNMENT, NOT A TRIAL . . .
MR. BRENNAN IS OPPOSED TO THE DEFENDANT BEING RELEASED ON HER OWN RECOGNIZANCE . . .
DOES THE PROSECUTOR THINK I'M TOO SEXY?
OUR JOB IS TO MAKE THIS CASE POLITICALLY UNSEXY FOR HIM, VEE
KEEPING MY CLIENT LOCKED UP IS SIMPLY NOT THE ANSWER
--THAT'S CENSORSHIP!
BUT YOUR HONOR-- THE DEFENDANT IS A PERFORMER . . . SHE MIGHT TAKE FLIGHT!
CONSIDERING THAT VAMPI CAN TURN INTO A BAT--
I'D HAVE TO ADMIT THAT'S TRUE!
GIVEN YOUR POLITICS, AURORA, DID YOU EVER THINK YOU'D BE HERE "ROOTING" FOR OL' LAW-AND-ORDER BRENNAN?
I'M NO FAN OF HIS--BUT I'D LOVE TO SEE HIM SHUT DOWN THAT "MAGIC SHOW"-- IT'S HIGHLY OFFENSIVE TO WOMEN!
MR. BRENNAN, THE DEFENDANT DOESN'T SEEM LIKE A FLIGHT RISK TO ME.
I'VE DECIDED TO ATTEND THE MAGIC SHOW AND SEE FOR MYSELF WHAT THE FUSS IS ALL ABOUT.
BUT, YOUR HONOR! IT'S-- IT'S-- SO SALACIOUS!

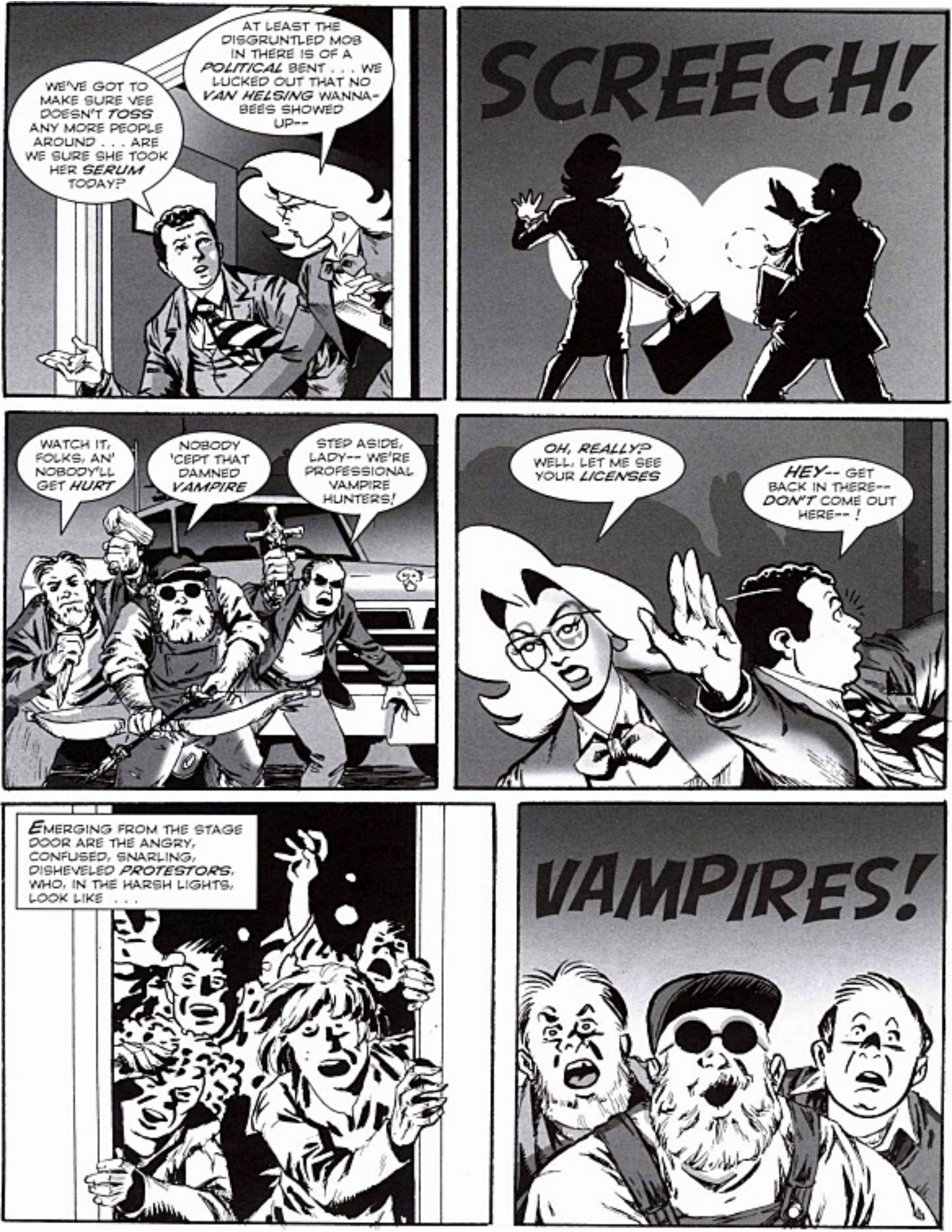
I'M A BIG BOY, MR. BRENNAN . . . ANY OBJECTIONS, MS. WOLFF?
NONE, YOUR HONOR
THEN I'LL SEE YOU TONIGHT--
WE ARE ADJOURNED
A TOAST TO OUR SUCCESS IS IN ORDER, DON'T YOU THINK?
WELL, VAMPIRELLA IS NOT OUT OF THE WOODS YET
YOUR LEGAL SYSTEM CAN BE INTIMIDATING, JEFFREY . . .
JUST BE GLAD YOU WEREN'T SUED, VEE

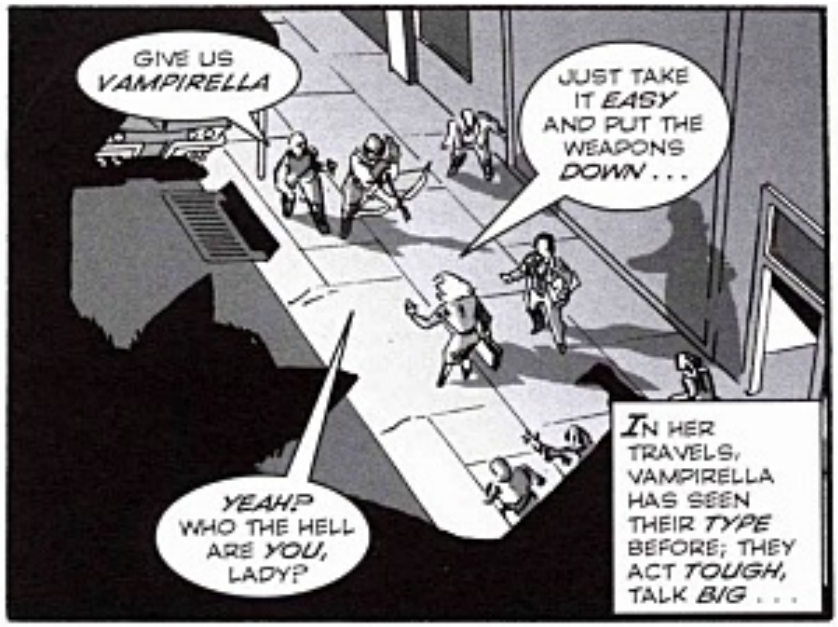
AH, YOU ARE CORRECT, ALANNA! I WILL NOT IMBIBE UNTIL AFTER TONIGHT'S SHOW . . .
AND THE JUDGE RULES IN VAMPI'S FAVOR!
THEN THE DRINKS WILL BE ON ME, MORDECAI!
LET'S HOPE YOUR SHOW WORKS MAGIC ON HIS DECISION
YOUR CLIENTS ARE ALL VAMPIRES, WEREWOLVES, AND THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT?
HEY, SOMEBODY'S GOT TO DEFEND THEM!
MOMMY, LOOK! THAT'S VAMPIRELLA!!
COME ALONG, YOU!

TSK! YOU'D THINK THEY'D HAVE DONE SOMETHING ABOUT THAT- THAT SLUT BY NOW!
EXPLOITIVE-- THAT'S WHAT IT IS! THE JUDGE NEEDS TO BE SENT A STRONG MESSAGE . . .
AURORA BASKIN, A LONGTIME ACTIVIST, GOES ONLINE TO ORGANIZE A PROTEST AT THE MAGIC SHOW . . .
THE WORD SPREADS QUICKLY THROUGH THE INTERNET . . .

...EVEN BEYOND POLITICAL CONCERNS . . .
VAMPIRELLA, EH?
CHECK THIS OUT
LET'S GET BUSY
AND SO, THAT NIGHT . . .
WITH ALL DUE RESPECT TO "PENDY," HE WOULDN'T HAVE MUCH OF AN ACT IF HE DIDN'T "TURN" HIS "ASSISTANT" INTO A BAT AS A FINALE!
I HAVE TO GIVE VAMPIRELLA CREDIT, THOUGH, FOR "HIDING" IN PLAIN SIGHT . . .
THE GENERAL PUBLIC HAS NO IDEA THAT SHE'S A REAL VAMPIRE
I WAS A BIT CONCERNED THAT THE PARANORMAL COGNOSCENTI MIGHT HARASS HER . . .
OR MAYBE SOME LONG-TIME FANS--?
WOLFF, PLEASE!
LET'S JUST ENJOY THE SHOW . . .
AND NOW PLEASE A BIG HAND FOR MY ASSISTANT . . .
. . . THE LOVELY AND VIVACIOUS--
BOO!
WHAT-- ? PENDY-- !
NO!
SEXIST TRASH
VAMOOSE, VAMP!!
DON'T SAY A WORD, MY DEAR--
YOU GO GIRL-- LEAVE!
--UNTIL OUR LAWYERS ADVISE US WHAT TO DO!
UGH!

I SAW YOU GIVE THE SIGNAL TO THE PROTESTORS . . .
YOU'RE RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS TURNING INTO A BRAWL!
IT'S NOT MY FAULT A LOT OF MEN CAN'T CONTROL THEIR--
KONK!
VEE-- LEAVE THE STAGE!
JEFFREY-- I CAN'T GO WITHOUT PENDY
WATCH OUT, VEE-- BEHIND YOU-- !
YOUR CONCERN IS SO SWEET, JEFFREY-- BUT I CAN TAKE CARE OF MYSELF!
HEY-- WHEN THAT GUY YOU FLIPPED CALLS HIS LAWYER, YOU'RE GOING TO NEED ME MORE THAN EVER!
BYRD-- !
THERE'S AN EXIT TO THE BACK ALLEY-- WE'VE GOT TO GET VAMPIRELLA AWAY FROM THIS MELEE
PENDY- ?
THAT'S MINE-- WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING, CREEP?
WASTE NOT, WANT NOT-- WHY NOT?
I'LL GET READY AND MEET YOU OUT BACK
WHAT DO THEY DO FOR AN ENCORE?


WE'VE GOT TO MAKE SURE VEE DOESN'T TOSS ANY MORE PEOPLE AROUND . . . ARE WE SURE SHE TOOK HER SERUM TODAY?
AT LEAST THE DISGRUNTLED MOB IN THERE IS OF A POLITICAL BENT . . . WE LUCKED OUT THAT NO VAN HELSING WANNA-BEES SHOWED UP--
SCREECH!
WATCH IT, FOLKS, AN' NOBODY'LL GET HURT
NOBODY 'CEPT THAT DAMNED VAMPIRE
STEP ASIDE, LADY-- WE'RE PROFESSIONAL VAMPIRE HUNTERS!
OH, REALLY? WELL, LET ME SEE YOUR LICENSES
HEY-- GET BACK IN THERE-- DON'T COME OUT HERE--!
EMERGING FROM THE STAGE DOOR ARE THE ANGRY, CONFUSED, SNARLING, DISHEVELED PROTESTORS, WHO, IN THE HARSH LIGHTS, LOOK LIKE . . .
VAMPIRES!


GIVE US VAMPIRELLA
JUST TAKE IT EASY AND PUT THE WEAPONS DOWN . . .
YEAH? WHO THE HELL ARE YOU, LADY?
IN HER TRAVELS, VAMPIRELLA HAS SEEN THEIR TYPE BEFORE; THEY ACT TOUGH, TALK BIG . . .

THESE VIGILANTES HAVE NO EXPERIENCE WITH THE SUPERNATURAL.
BUT RIGHT NOW, THEY KNOW ONE THING: FEAR . . .

I AM VAMPIRELLA--
--AND THESE ARE MY ATTORNEYS.

VROOM!
SOME "VAMPIRE HUNTERS"! HIGH-TAILING IT OUT OF HERE LIKE BATS OUT OF HELL! I HAVE TWO WORDS FOR IT . . .

AU SALUT!
BUT WERE THEY MORE AFRAID OF ME-- OR OF YOU GUYS?
PUT YOURSELF IN THEIR SHOES-- I'D KNOW WHICH ONE I'D BE AFRAID OF!
THIS ISN'T OVER--

WE'RE GOING TO SUE VAMPIRELLA
AND THAT THIRD-RATE MAGICIAN SHE WORKS FOR
AND THE NIGHTCLUB
AND WHOEVER CONKED ME ON THE HEAD WITH A BOTTLE!
EXCUSE ME--

YOU'RE THE ONE WHO INCITED THE RIOT AGAINST MY CLIENT . . .
YOU THINKING WHAT I'M THINKING, PENDY?
MIND-READING IS A PART OF MY ACT, MY DEAR
THIS IS @#$%&! AMERICA-- I CAN PROTEST AND SUE WHOEVER THE @#$%&! I WANT
OOOH-- I'M NO DOCTOR, BUT I THINK I'VE GOT A CONCUSSION
JUST THEN . . .
I WAS SUPPOSED TO SEE THE MAGIC ACT TONIGHT TO DECIDE WHETHER IT'S INDECENT, BUT I WAS HINDERED
EXCUSE ME . . . COMING THROUGH--
JUDGE SUTTON?
THAT'S RIGHT-- AND I'M GOING TO CHARGE ALL THESE PROTESTERS WITH OBSTRUCTION OF JUSTICE
I HOPE HIS HONOR UNDERSTANDS THAT OUR CLIENT WAS A VICTIM OF THE FRACAS TONIGHT AS WELL
OF COURSE! I'M GOING TO DISMISS THE CHARGES AGAINST HER-- THE PROTESTERS INTERFERED WITH HER FIRST AMENDMENT RIGHTS
VEE! DID YOU HEAR THAT?
VEE- ?
GONE, EH? PENDRAGON DID WHAT ANY GOOD MAGICIAN WOULD DO-- MADE HIMSELF AND HIS ASSISTANT DISAPPEAR
AT LEAST YOU GOT TO SEE VAMPIRELLA IN THE FLESH . . .
YES . . . AND IT WAS SOME FLESH . . . !
PRESENTLY, ON A CRUISE SHIP HEADED FOR EUROPE . . .
OH, I'M SURE WE'LL DO WELL ENOUGH ON OUR EUROPEAN TOUR, PENDY
WE CAN SCARCELY AFFORD IT, VAMPI, BUT I'LL MAKE SURE WOLFF & BYRD ARE COMPENSATED FOR THEIR WORK
ALANNA WAS NICE, BUT JEFF WAS SO SWEET-- I'M SORRY WE HAD TO LEAVE SO QUICKLY
I JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY PEOPLE WHO DON'T LIKE OUR SHOW WOULD WANT TO SHUT IT DOWN . . . NOW THAT'S INDECENT!
I CONCUR, MY DEAR, BUT THOSE DRUMBEATS OF LITIGATION WERE GETTING TOO LOUD FOR US TO STAY AROUND
FOR JOSE GONZALEZ

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CONSTANTINE: HELL HATH NO FURY

KEANU REEVES AND DJIMON HOUNSOU BRING DC/VERTIGO'S LEGENDARY TROUBLEMAKER TO THE BIG SCREEN

The all-star cast of Keanu Reeves, Djimon Hounsou and Rachel Weisz bring *Constantine* to life.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY WARNER BROS.; ART COURTESY DC COMICS.

Djimon Hounsou plays "savvy witchdoctor" Papa Midnite.

AT THE STROKE OF MIDNITE

DJIMON HOUNSOU TAKES KEANU REEVES TO HELL AND BACK IN THE HIGHLY ANTICIPATED COMIC-BOOK ADAPTATION CONSTANTINE

BY JIM CATAPANO AND BON ALIMAGNO

John Constantine (Reeves) and Papa Midnite (Hounsou) are partners in crime.

Comics' favorite trickster magician is brought to life February 18th in *Constantine*, a new film adapted from the long-running *Hellblazer* series published by DC/Vertigo. Able to smooth talk his way out of any problem divine or demonic, John Constantine, played by Keanu Reeves, finds himself unable to fight off end stage lung cancer. Meanwhile, he teams with Detective Sergeant Angela Dodson (Rachel Weisz) in the hunt for a serial killer who preys on psychics and magicians. The world of the movie captures the foreboding feel of the comics to a surprising extent. *Constantine's* production has not been without controversy though, as is typical when a long-running comic finally hits the screens. Primarily, *Hellblazer* fans have been unhappy with director Francis Lawrence's "Americanization" of the story, with the casting of non-Brit Reeves and the move of the story's setting from London to Los Angeles. The film has also floated from a PG-13 to an R rating and back. Along for the ride is Academy Award® Nominated actor Djimon Hounsou, who plays Constantine's former partner, Papa Midnite, whom the actor describes as a "savvy witchdoctor."

"IT WAS A DELIGHT TO WORK WITH KEANU REEVES!" HE SAYS. "THAT WAS BEAUTIFUL... I WOULD LOVE TO WORK WITH HIM AGAIN IN A HEARTBEAT."

First-time director Francis Lawrence cast Keanu Reeves as the hardboiled magician.

Hounsou, a native of Benin, moved to France in his early teens. Discovered on the streets of Paris by a fashion designer, he first drew critical attention with his first break-out performance in *Amistad*, playing a slave fighting to return home. His most recent success was the acclaimed *In America* for which he was honored with an Oscar® nomination. Now, he adds *Constantine* to his already impressive resume. "Papa Midnite is COOL!" enthuses Hounsou. "He was Constantine's partner-in-crime and he was a witchdoctor, which is one of the things that back in my home country is well-known. It was just a cool character to play, really."

The actor appears to relish the role. "At one point, he and Constantine were great friends and they used to run around Los Angeles saving people from strange threats and healing those who were possessed. They were partners for a long time. But in the process of it, he turned out to be more business oriented in the same field, selling out the magic he had worked with before."

Despite some rough edges, Hounsou sees Papa Midnite as a character on the side of the angels. "Oh, yes, he's definitely a good guy," he says. "He just has a deeper interest in doing business than Constantine. Constantine is pretty much straight-forward with why he is there and what he is doing. And, Papa Midnite just thinks he is there to accommodate both worlds."

Besides the chance to play a pivotal part, Hounsou was also attracted to the project by the cast and crew, particularly the man in the title role.

"It was a DELIGHT to work with Keanu Reeves!" he says. "That was beautiful. He's a very talented man. I really, really enjoyed it and I would love to work with him again in a heartbeat. He's that supportive of other people in his films as well." Hounsou says Reeves kept "very much to himself — introverted is the word."

Yet, the two were able to connect. "I personally hope I learned something from him. With great thanks, I will take that with me to whatever job I do from now on. The guy is talented. I was pleased to spend this little time with him, working with him and discovering him, really. I've always heard of the 'actor Keanu Reeves' and there he is and you experience him first hand. I would love to repeat that experience again."

Some actors might have worried about working with a first time director. Hounsou, though, explained that he had a great working relationship with Lawrence and that the typical trepidation actors often have when working with a "first-timer" was not in evidence.

"We always think first-time directors in the process of learning the craft learn what it is to be a director. We have an expectation he may not know how to direct really," he says. "Most of us think, 'First time director, he hasn't done it before, so he wouldn't know.' But surprisingly here, he was quite aware. He was a director PERIOD. He knew how to get what he wanted out of his actors. If you've been around sets long enough, you've seen temperaments that can be hurtful at times, but he has an amazing personality on and off set."

The actor relates to the role the occult played in the movie, saying that he drew on his own observations of occult practices in the West and Africa. He acknowledges a marked difference between the two cultures: "Obviously, there are things that we are more aware of or, should I say, have a certain use of that the Western world does not," he said. "As if they don't get it or it's sort of neglected. I'm not sure which is which, but one way or another we're still aware of the occult in the African cultures as well as have the understanding of the ancestors, ghosts, and the understanding also of a certain mystical life beyond this life. For me, it was quite exciting to be part of that."

Despite his enthusiasm, he is aware that many *Hellblazer* purists are not pleased with the film's Los Angeles setting. "Apparently, everyone was complaining about the fact the story originally took place in England, so people were somewhat bashing it. I think the story can easily take place in the streets of L.A. And it also makes it interesting to show the dirt of L.A. in the story, so I think people will enjoy it."

Hounsou foresees great critical and commercial success for *Constantine*, as foreshadowed by the reception given at last year's San Diego Comic-Con International.

"Everybody was excited about the debut of the film," he remembers. "I think it'll be a beautiful reception. It certainly was when we were in San Diego. We're certainly hoping that when the movie comes out people will be quite excited by it."

While he had a great time making the movie, the actor believes that the significance of the experience will become far clearer in hindsight. "A lot of things we take away from our great experiences, most of the time we don't know what it is until it has revealed itself to us sometime later. I've said it's a nice experience: getting to know a great group of people, meeting a great actor and having a great time with him and meeting a soon to be discovered great director, Lawrence – for now that's what I'm walking away with."

You haven't seen the last of Djimon Hounsou in comic-related projects. "Well, comic books give you a certain freedom with going the distance with most of the characters, really. I'd love it. I'm sort of thinking of creating one myself so I would love to do one again." His fans, whose numbers will surely grow with *Constantine's* release, would love to see him back on the big screen as soon as possible, working his magic.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY WARNER BROS.; ART COURTESY DC COMICS

CONSTANTINE: THE COMICS

DEAL WITH THE DEVIL

"THERE'S MORE THAN ONE ROAD LEADS TO HELL." AND JOHN CONSTANTINE HAS THE MAP.

BY MAUREEN MCTIGUE

The dark corners of the DC Comics Universe, the world known as Vertigo, quietly edged its way into being years after the books and characters themselves were already established. It was in those early years, books still bulleted by the traditional starred circle logo of the company, that John Constantine made his way into the world of *Swamp Thing*, a world already tainted by black magic and real life. Alan Moore created him in 1985, at the behest of artists, Steve Bissette and John Totleben. "They both wanted to do a character that looked like Sting," said Moore. "Sting has seen the character and commented in *Rolling Stone* that he thought it was great. He was very flattered to have a comic character who looked like him."

Quickly becoming a popular supporting character in *Saga of Swamp Thing*, John Constantine was given his own title – *John Constantine: Hellblazer* – two years after his debut. Before knowing about the new series, *Swamp Thing* writer Rick Veitch decided that Constantine still had a place in the bayou, as the surrogate father for Swamp Thing and Abigail Holland's child. And so, Constantine, possessed by the Elemental Spirit, provided the base for Tefé Holland, who in one incarnation was the titular *Swamp Thing* herself. But it's within the pages of the 175-plus books where John Constantine has developed from a post-punk mage with a political edge, reflecting writer Jamie Delano's views on England in the late 80s, through Garth Ennis' personal demons and into Warren Ellis' angst. Each of the many *Hellblazer* artists has brought forth more of Constantine's humanity while adding levels of hell to his life, and to the lives of those around him.

As adept with a silver-edged tongue as he is with magic, John Constantine tends to be haunted by the ghosts of his past, literally and figuratively, as those friends he kept so close often wound up dead, no matter who was writing him at the time. In the introduction to "Dangerous Habits," one of the 16 available

collections of *Constantine* material, writer Garth Ennis explains, "Here was a comic without an agenda, without some loathsome morality at its core, but instead with a central character who made and broke his own rules as he staggered through life, and could only face the consequences of his actions with the same frail, human defenses that are available to you or me." "Habits" has been one of the most popular of the Constantine tales, a story where John battles the cancer ravaging his body in his own special holistic way: by beating three devils and making them cure him… as his own friends die around him.

Jamie Delano, who first wrote the character's solo stories, notes that the first nine issues of the new series "detail the adventuring of one John Constantine, an insouciant, somewhat amoral occult dabbler and 'psychic detective' with a British working class background." Delano bit into politics with his Constantine "hoping that maybe the concerns of the 1990s would call for a more forward-looking, radical-evolutionary response from fiction. No such luck. Greed and self-interest prevail and our collective subconscious will continue to squirm and extrude guilty nightmares in response." Written by Delano in 1992, much of what he says can still apply to today. If the series reflects real world problems and ideals within a context of Hell on Earth, then the movie may be arriving at quite possibly the best time.

Leonardo Manco's cover art for *All His Engines*

ALL ENGINES: GO

JUST IN TIME FOR THE MOVIE, DC/VERTIGO COMICS IS RELEASING AN ORIGINAL HELLBLAZER GRAPHIC NOVEL. WE SPOKE WITH WRITER MIKE CAREY ABOUT JOHN CONSTANTINE: HELLBLAZER – ALL HIS ENGINES.

What makes John Constantine JOHN CONSTANTINE?

I think the essence of John is the combination of real magical power and knowledge and the incredible amount of bluff and bullshit that he puts out. He represents us in the halls of the damned and the blessed with one finger stuck up.

Describe *All His Engines*.

We bring John to rock bottom. He's out of options, out of gas, and fighting against opponents who are inconceivably more powerful than he is. But being John, he's more dangerous in that situation than in any other, because the worse things get the more ruthlessly he'll cheat and improvise.

How is he ALWAYS able to get out of trouble?

The crises that he finds himself in are never easily defused, and there's always a price to pay. John gets through them with incredible cunning – but also with incredible ruthlessness. The price always ends up being paid by the people around him rather than by John himself. He *does* feel a certain amount of guilt but he keeps doing it. Because the truth is that he can't stop…

ALL ART COURTESY DC COMICS

"What might happen if Chris Ware were to have created 'The Family Circus'.

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SPRING MOVIE PREVIEW!

FROM THE RETURN OF THE *RING* TO A VISIT TO *SIN CITY*, THE SEASON'S CAN'T-MISS FLICKS WILL WARM YOU UP AFTER A LONG WINTER!

Naomi Watts discovers the secret of *Ring Two*. Christina Ricci (left) finds herself *Cursed*. Jordan Ladd (right) struggles to survive the *Madhouse*.

RING TWO

Opens March 18

All she wanted was a new life for her and her son. Moving from Seattle to the small mountain community of Astoria, Oregon, Rachel Keller thought they were safe. But now, six months after the horrifying events that terrorized her, new secrets and new evils lurk in the shadows. Rachel and her son are thrown into a relentless cycle of terror and death that seems...eerily familiar.

Academy Award nominee® Naomi Watts (*21 Grams*) reprises her role as investigative journalist Rachel Keller in *Ring Two*. Simon Baker ("The Guardian"), David Dorfman (*Texas Chainsaw Massacre*), Elizabeth Perkins (*About Last Night*), Sissy Spacek (*Carrie*), and Emily VanCamp ("Everwood") also star in the film.

Director Hideo Nakata, the director of *Ringu*, the Japanese film upon which *The Ring* was based, makes his American debut with this film. Walter F. Parkes and Laurie MacDonald, who also produced *The Ring*, produce *Ring Two*. Screenwriter Ehren Kruger, who wrote the first film, also returns for the sequel.

CURSED

Opens February 25

Horror maestro Wes Craven and writer Kevin Williamson, the team that brought you *Scream*, come together again for *Cursed*. After the two breathed new life into the once tired slasher-flick genre, they have turned their attentions to another long maligned side of horror: werewolves. When a brother and sister are driven off a Los Angeles road late one night by something from the shadows, they awake finding their lives changed forever.

Starring Christina Ricci as the sister, with a slew of guest appearances by the likes of Shannon Elizabeth, Michael Rosenbaum and even Scott Baio, this movie follows in *Scream's* footsteps. Expect plenty of werewolf-inflicted gore, but don't be surprised if Craven and Williamson inject some of their now patented black humor into the mix as well.

As the film's finale was being shot in June 2003, the movie's studio, Dimension Films, ordered a halt to production and an immediate rewrite of the movie's third act. The delay allowed Craven to revisit the werewolf scenes, using the added time to augment legendary make-up wizard Rick Baker's werewolves with some newly developed CGI effects. The results are something Craven is apparently satisfied with, though whether *Cursed* does for werewolves what *Scream* did for slasher movies is up to audiences to decide.

MADHOUSE

Coming to DVD February 22

Clark Stevens (*Chronicles of Riddick's* Joshua Leonard) wants to make a difference by caring for the mentally ill. But what he thinks is a place for recovery and healing, is soon revealed to be a house of horrors. Here at Cunningham Hall Mental Facility, everyone's just a bit crazier than they should be. He's introduced to the basement ward, full of flies, its ceilings dripping ooze and lit by a furnace's infernal glow. He's told this is where they keep those whose natural instinct is to rip you limb from limb.

Stevens soon bonds with one of the nurses, the sweeter than sweet Sara (Jordan Ladd of *Cabin Fever*) leading to some inevitable sexual tension.

Someone starts killing the staff, electrocuting one, chopping up another. That's when the madness truly begins. Stevens starts seeing things he can't explain and he starts wondering if these murders are the work of human hands or one of those things flitting in and out of the corner of his eye? Or could it be someone else entirely, someone right under his nose? What started as something simple, turns to a slow descent into madness.

ALSO UPCOMING!

THE TOOLBOX MURDERS

On DVD March 15

The long awaited release of this potential breakout hit is finally here! Buzz on the movie is it could put Tobe Hooper back on the map of the great horror film directors. Somewhere in Hollywood, an abandoned hotel houses a dormant evil. Now a series of murders force a young woman to go through hell to solve the mystery.

SIN CITY

Opens April 1

One of the most anticipated movies of the year stars Mickey Rourke, Jessica Alba, Bruce Willis, Rosario Dawson, Jamie King and too many other all-stars to mention. Check out the April issue of *Vampirella Magazine* for total coverage including an exclusive interview with *Sin City* creator and co-director Frank Miller.

THE AMITYVILLE HORROR

Opens April 15

The remake is apparently a more faithful adaptation of the book with star Ryan Reynolds calling it a psychological thriller. Many of the filmmakers went to great lengths to ground it in reality, doing research on the original grisly events and even talking to townspeople.

HOUSE OF WAX

Opens April 29

A pair or bloodthirsty brothers have turned their area's main attraction, a wax museum, into a den or murder. A group of friends, including Elisha Cuthbert and Chad Michael Murray, are ensnared in their trap. Will their corpses join the other exhibits at the museum of death?

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INNER BEAUTIES

If a picture is worth a thousand words, BRIAN HABERLIN has produced the great American novel.

By Maureen McTigue

Art from Haberlin's new book, *Neobeauties*

BRIAN HABERLIN

Working as a professional artist for over 20 years, Brian Haberlin has done it all. From running his own studio employing artists from around the world, to co-creating comics characters, writing a novel and creating a system that's not meant to put pencillers out of business — but one can never tell, Haberlin is in one person an art tour-de-force.

His newest project, *NeoBeauties*, is an art book above all, but it's also a concept book. The oversized volume, available in both hardcover and softcover from Image Comics, showcases Haberlin's love of the classic pinup – Betty Page, Vargas Girls – but with his unique and modern spin.

It's the unique side of Haberlin's skills, his advancement of the use of computers in comics and illustration, that makes this book that much more appealing. "The computer is another tool to use and it really changed the way we letter, ink, color and do production on comics but really hasn't touched penciling. I've done CG since the Amiga days," he laughs, "and always wanted to incorporate it into my comic and illustration work. I'd do experiments here and there — we're talking at least a decades worth — and it never really came together."

The frustration of artist as creator and as innovator has plagued and inspired the forms over centuries. Haberlin took that and ran. "One day, I started to doodle in a printout of a CG piece I did, and it looked

ALL ART BY BRIAN HABERLIN

"THE IMAGES FOR THE BOOK JUST BEGAN TO FLOW RIGHT OUT OF ME BEFORE THERE WAS ANY IDEA TO DO A BOOK."

really cool. It came to me to hybrid the CG with handwork: use the computer to speed up part of the process, not for it to be the end all. I then step on the digital work with good ol' analog pencil, paint, charcoal, watercolor, whatever was needed. Once the hand-work was done on the pieces," he enthuses, "they came alive!

"My friends who are purists and always hate work I do in CG. Though they love my oils or other paints, they are fans of the new stuff, partially because they don't know what it is. Is it a painting or a drawing? I love that!" Haberlin's excitement and interest in the potential abounds. "I showed some of the new pieces to a guy who was an executive at a big CG animation house, and he didn't know the base for the work was CG."

Having worked in the traditional mode of comics and illustration, handling superheroes and monsters, outer space and inner turmoil, *Neobeauties* offers a look into Haberlin's self, something beyond what's expected. "The images for the book just began to flow right out of me before there was any idea to do a book," he notes and laughs, "I figured I should do *something* with these pieces. That's when the art book idea came to me: do something that I'd like to buy myself. You can go to neobeauties.com for more pics from it and other info."

Haberlin's easy going and ready to sell you on his book – an easy sale – or on the new art techniques he's been developing since he got into the business of comics over a decade ago. And though it is an industry that tends to fight new things, Haberlin's been lucky enough to meet little resistance for his computer-based art stylization.

"The response was overwhelming from publishers, fans, and pros alike," he says. "I debuted it at Chicago Con [2003] and showed it to [artist] Dave Finch who I've known since our early days at Top Cow. When he saw it he just looked at me and said, 'You did it, you finally did it. You're going to put us all out of work,' meaning pencillers. It's not true, of course. It's apples and oranges to conventional work but that was high praise coming from him."

Haberlin's range is stunning, and it comes from what he enjoys. "I love all kinds of different art," he notes, "so it's more a matter of developing several styles and refining those. I get bored very easily so out of necessity I have a cartoony style, a painterly style, a comic style, a photo real style…and they *all* look entirely different. I almost think sometimes of just making up new fictitious artists to be each style I have inside me, kind of like Jean Girard with Moebius and *Blueberry*…not that I'm comparing my talent with his by the way, he's incredible!"

NeoBeauties provides more than just pretty pictures. The book also shows some step-by-step work, short tutorials to give the reader a taste of the magic. Haberlin doesn't want people to stop and say, "Oh, yeah, computers." It's so much more than that. "I don't think people think of it as digital. I think, or at least hope they'll think, 'That is so cool! How's it done?'"

Brian Haberlin's *NeoBeauties* is available now from Image Comics.

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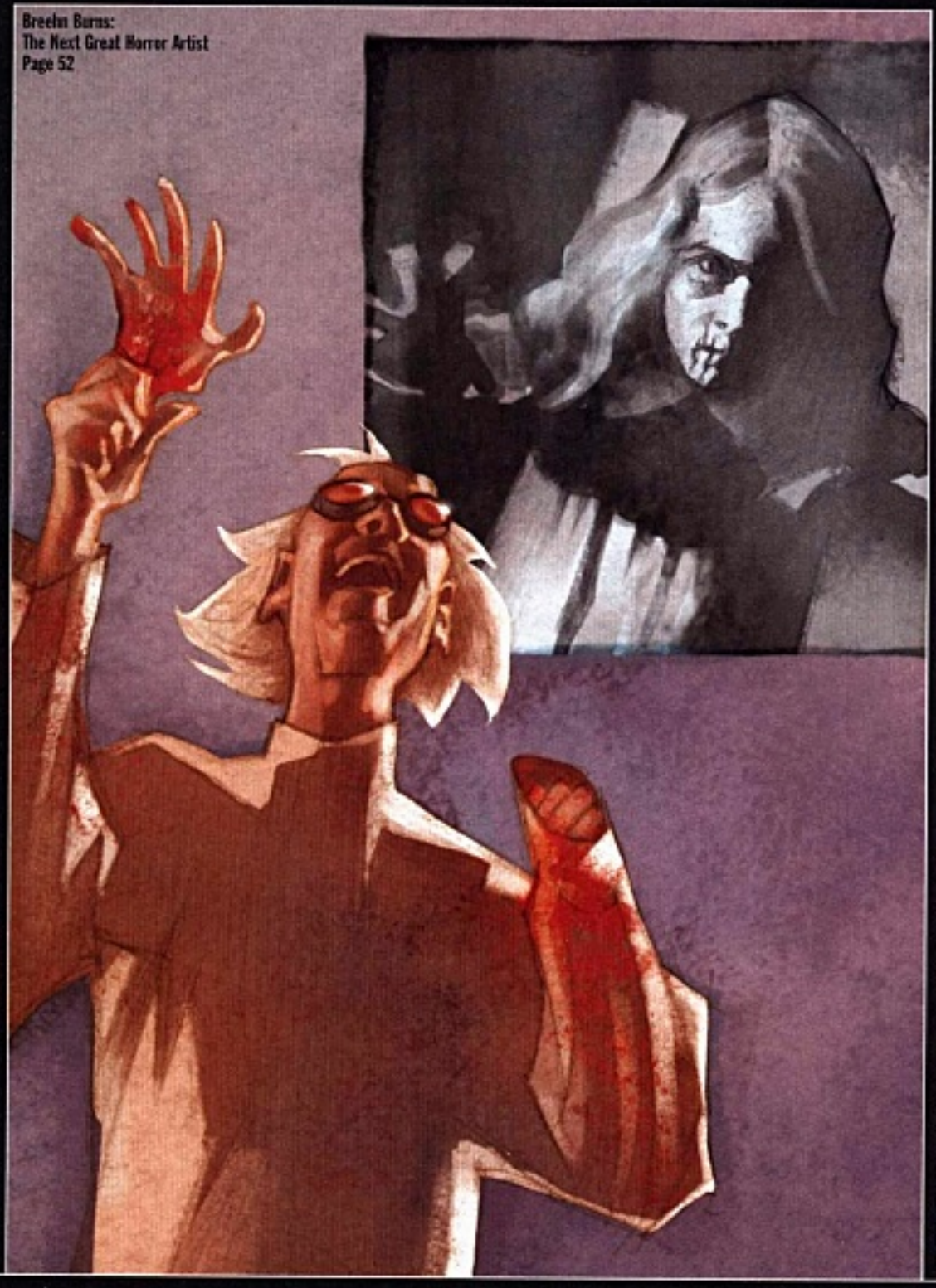

Breehn Burns:
The Next Great Horror Artist
Page 52

LUNACHICKS: LINDA TAPENA

Rick Spears returns to Mars
Page 42

Not More Math!
Back into the *Cube*
Page 56

Stacy's Waiting for You
Page 58

The Vault 39
Texarkana, Fortress of Solitude & Morel

Flesh & Blood 42
Western Tales of Terror's Flaikov
Teenagers from Mars' Rick Spears
Sword of Dracula's Greg Scott

Breehn Burns 52
A rising star shares his story

Vampi Tale 46
Sword of Dracula: "Witness, Part 2"

Suckers 56
Cube Zero: This time with acid

Luna Chicks 58
Stacy Walker: An Artist's Dream

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by Mike Segretto

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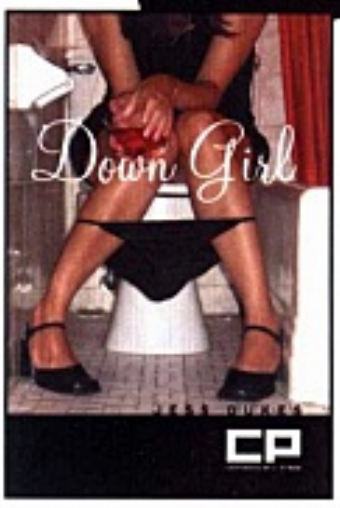

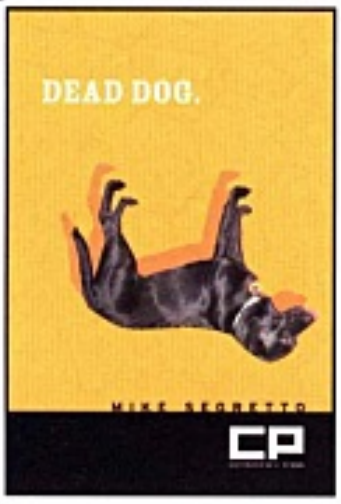

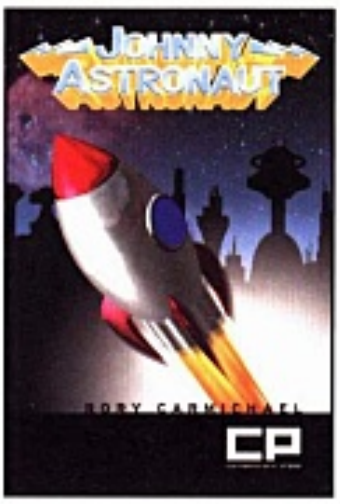

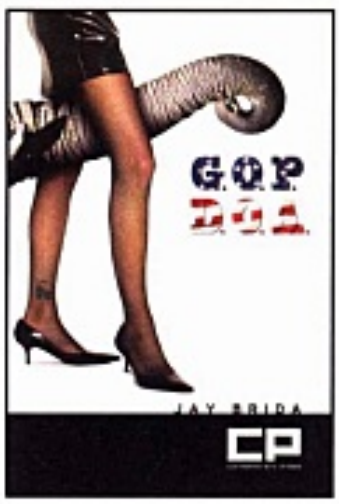

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THE VAULT

MYRIAD MANIC MAYHEM THAT MATTERS

COMICS

LAW AND ORDER

The Fate of the Future's Up for Grabs

TEXARKANA
Writer: Patrick Neighly
Artist: Donny Hadiwidjaja
Mad Yak Press
(www.madyakpress.com)

What would happen if the wall between law and order, between the police and judicial system, were brought down? Patrick Neighly explores that question in his latest original graphic novel *Texarkana*. The prolific writer has seemingly tackled every type of story he could.

In this, one of his strongest efforts, Neighly puts a new spin on the post-apocalyptic cop story, using a deft mix of humor and strong characterization to propel it forward. Indeed, this isn't just another bleak *Blade Runner* rip-off. America's split into three new countries, each out for its own interests. In the rough world of Texarkana, teams of four dispense both law and order – even holding court as a crime is in progress and promptly handing out sentence. The story focuses on one team welcoming a new member, Simon Hills, fresh from the academy and full of naiveté and optimism. Barry Masters, veteran prosecutor of the team, quickly tells him to unlearn everything he's been taught. "Our job is to uphold the law," says Masters. "The rules the academy taught you aren't the law."

Soon enough the team's sent to New Asia, a breakaway country running along the west coast. They're to investigate a political activist stirring up trouble, only they don't know what he looks like, where he is or why they, of all people, are sent in to do it. Something's not quite right and before the mission's through the four will have become unwitting pawns in a dangerous political game. So goes the first harsh lesson in the reeducation of Simon Hills. —*BA*

THE ART OF GREG HORN

Writer/Artist: Greg Horn
Image Comics
(www.imagecomics.com)

Talk about worth the wait. *The Art of Greg Horn*, originally slated for an October 2004 release, barely made it out in time for the holidays. Packed to the brim with the Marvelous beauties he's known for painting, Horn devotes plenty of space to showcasing pieces comic fans may not be familiar with, including his work for Official Xbox Magazine, 100% PSM Magazine, Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey Circus and Bacardi.com, not to mention Horn's previously unpublished original design for his 2004 US Olympic Basketball Team poster. Many of the pages contain commentary from Horn about his paintings and provide an interesting supplement to the art. Unfortunately, Horn succeeded too well in not trying to let the text distract from the art. Often, the text is so subtle in placement or color that you can turn the page without noticing it. Some of the most interesting writing, however, is from Brian Michael Bendis's introduction where he reveals a huge project we almost saw Greg Horn work on. That's right, almost. More than just a gallery of pretty pictures, *The Art of Greg Horn* gives readers an insight to the page to pixel process with numerous side-by-side comparisons of Horn's pencils with the finished product as well as a step-by-step tutorial on his painting method, before and after pictures of friends and captives used as models and several pages of sketches. Comic book art fans will find it complete. Greg Horn fans will find it leaving them wanting more. —*Tim Paulison*

LESS THAN HEROES

Writer/Artist: David Yurkovich
Top Shelf Productions
(www.topshelfcomix.com)

David Yurkovich's *Less Than Heroes* collection from Top Shelf is both more and less than the title suggests. In Yurkovich's world there are HEROES like the New York Superhero Syndicate whose legend alone is enough to scare away criminals. But this isn't a story about the unionized heroes of the NYSS. It's about where their enemies are heading: Philadelphia. And it's about THRESHOLD, Philly's only officially contracted superheroes.

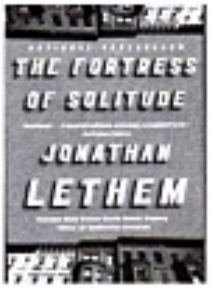
In this city of brotherly love, the mighty quartet of THRESHOLD can't get themselves into a union, but they protect us all — that is when they're not too busy making snacks. These heroes seem more concerned with battling indigestion than their enemies. THRESHOLD is comprised of The Cosmopolitan, Mr. Malevolence, Meridian and Recoil, four pop culture spouting, sugar high characters that incidentally have superpowers (or at least pretend to). It's a job for them not a way of life.

The stories themselves effortlessly move from deadly serious to downright ludicrous, alternating between *Watchmen* and *The Tick* between each panel. Imagine an episode of *Seinfeld* set within *Law & Order* and you can start to see Yurkovich's unique superhero perspective. I honestly couldn't tell whether I was supposed to laugh or cringe while reading this. But in today's cluttered superhero white noise comic shelf, I think that's a good thing. *Less Than Heroes* is a character driven, classic silver age story and a must have for any mod comic collection. —*Jason Brightman*

BOOKS

RINGBEARERS

Lethem returns to Brooklyn



THE FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE

Author: Jonathan Lethem
Vintage Contemporaries (vintagebooks.com)

Picking up on the title of his most popular novel, *Motherless Brooklyn*, Jonathan Lethem introduces two young boys as they grow up in the rough Brooklyn of the 70s, and how their love of music and infatuation with comic books pushed them each in different directions.

Raising themselves after being either abandoned by a mother (Dylan) or bought off from one (Mingus), the boys are as different as possible even without the racial differences that exist in them and in their neighborhood. Dylan, surrounded by art, and Mingus, surrounded by music, each turn to the other's base to find himself.

Lethem weaves a strong tale of growing up in troubled times and the paths – drugs, crime, questions, running away – that people find themselves on due to where they come from. The second half of the book, the boys as adults, wondering about the magic ring and what their lives mean now, is more powerful than their childhood of frustration and fear.

What makes a hero? More than a magic ring, it's the man inside, and neither boy is ever man enough. *–Maureen McTigue*

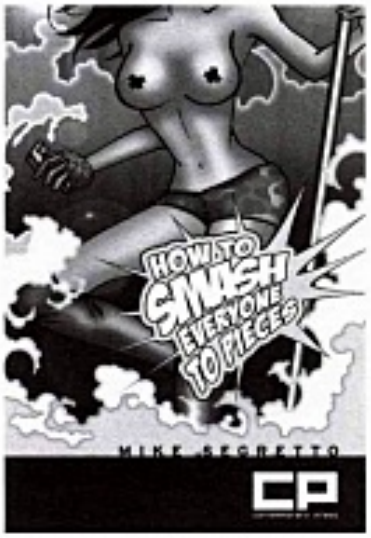
HOW TO SMASH EVERYONE TO PIECES

Author: Mike Segretto
Contemporary Press (contemporarypress.com)

Oddly enticing due to its perversely peculiar main characters, *How to Smash Everyone to Pieces* destroys the notion of traditional storytelling, twisting this first-person screed of revenge and, well, lesbian incest around the reader's poor little brain.

Mary and Desiree are sisters on the run from the law, only Desiree got caught and it's up to Mary to spring her. The destruction she leaves in her wake explains the book's title as Mary aptly smashes all in front of her to get to her one true love.

Segretto litters the book with superhero allusions, Mary is convinced nothing can stop her and that she's fighting the good fight; after all, what is more important than love? Love conquers all, and the realities of the murders, kidnapping, theft and property destruction she has committed is nothing compared to the one reunion she longs for.



Smash is disturbing due to the harsh relationship of the sisters, but the book is a fun explosion of the ridiculous. Once you think Mary can't top what she just did, she takes you outside and smacks you around a bit, showcasing her innate ability to smash everything to pieces. *–MM*

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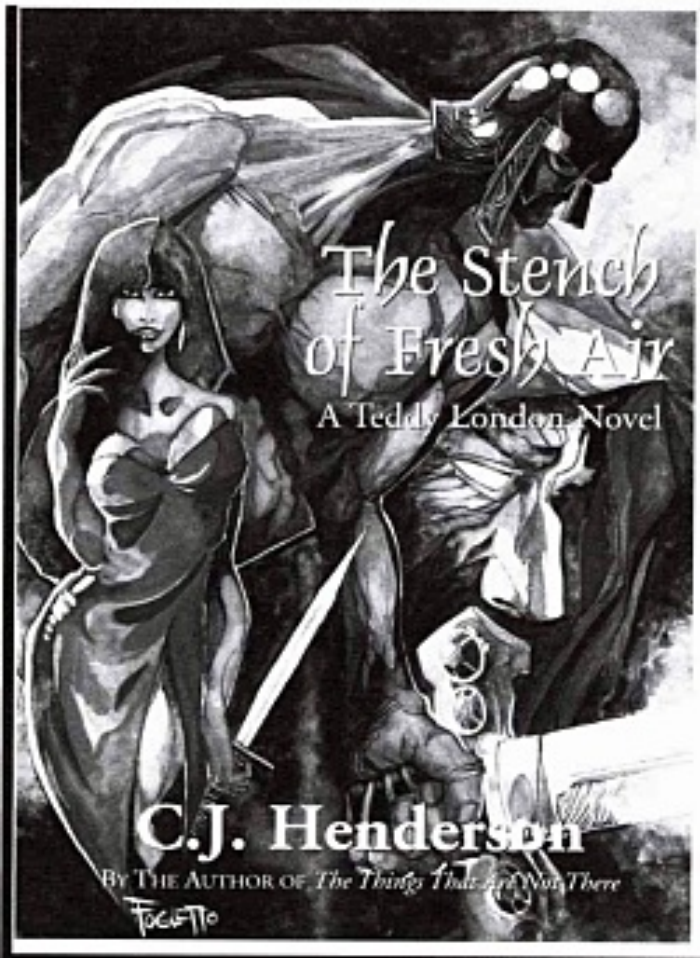

"The consistently enjoyable C.J. Henderson delivers again ..."
Cemetery Dance

Private Detective Teddy London, battered almost unto death by forces from beyond, discovers on his first day out of his recovery bed that while he's been incapacitated, a coven of vampires has set forces in motion so that they might come forth from the shadows and begin their march for world domination. Worse yet, London learns that he may have more in common with such forces than he thinks.

Armed with only a .38 named Betty and a blade named Veronica, Teddy London gathers those few souls capable of weathering the terror ahead. In this second adventure, London and those who stand with him face both power and temptations unimaginable. It is a conflict they will not all survive.

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FLESH&BLOOD

tapping the creative vein

LIVING DANGEROUSLY

RICK SPEARS HIT IT BIG WITH *TEENAGERS FROM MARS.* NOW HE'S READY TO GET *GIGANTIC.* By Bon Alimagno

Teenagers from Mars, a comic project once so bewildering no publisher would touch it, is now collected together for the first time in trade paperback. For a series that had looked like it may never see the light of day, *TFM* has become an indie comics sensation as well as making its creators, Rob G and Rick Spears, rising stars in the industry.

"I don't know if it was destiny that brought us together," says Spears, "but it works like chocolate and peanut butter." The

result is something not as simple to define. Part horror, part teen romance, part political screed, Spears revels in the series hard-to-grasp nature. "It's a story about kids getting in trouble and falling in love. It's about a rolled-up comic book stuffed in one back pocket with a still warm slingshot crammed in the other. It's about making comics dangerous again."

Spears' sharp writing and Rob G's dynamic, manga-influenced art style seem perfect for each other. Indeed, their near parallel lives point to an inevitable teaming of the two, though they only

met recently. "We are both from Virginia and we both went to VCU (Virginia Commonwealth University). We both moved to Brooklyn and we have a bunch of mutual friends. We were both even at the same party that became the zombie party in issue #2. But we never met until *TFM*."

The series focuses on Macon, a young MallMart clerk fired for refusing to remove comics a customer finds offensive from his store's shelves. "When he is targeted by the local censors for obscenity, he targets back," says Spears. "With the help of Max, a grave robbing thirteen-year-old, and Madison, the strong and independent punk beauty, he forms the world's first comic book liberation army."

The CBLA starts as a kind of joke but takes on a life of its own. It quickly spirals into a phenomenon that grips the sleepy town of Mars leaving everyone from Macon to the town's mayor battered and bloody.

Spears says many publishers just didn't seem to "get it" and passed on *TFM*. The duo self-published the series, thriving where so many have failed in the past. "I think publishers for the most part know their particular audience and give them what they want," says Spears. "That said, I think comics have a lot more potential than what is currently on the market and that's why I've formed Gigantic Graphic Novels (see NewsBites). *TFM* is a good example of a book that was passed on by the current publishers but still found an audience. Gigantic will focus on similar projects and look outward for new emerging audiences."

Readers though certainly got *TFM*'s political statement: freedom of speech, especially in comics, is under greater threat now than it's been since the 50s. "Well, I took up fighting the censorship of comics in a comic so it's not too hard of a sell, given the audience. With the war and the election, the country has made a clear conservative turn. We're clipping our own wings just to be safe and that's crazy to me." Spears has also noticed a few taking Macon's struggle an extra step, whether joining the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund (www.cbldf.org) or continuing the fight for "comic liberation." "I know at least one CBLA chapter has formed at SUNY Purchase (State University of New York). The school gives them money each semester with which they've been buying graphic novels and donating them to the library. At the end of the day it's all about action." Does Spears think "CBLA" grafitti is next? "It's only a matter of time."

ART BY ROB G

Fialkov's assembled a diverse pool of new and established talent for Western Tales.

POINTS WEST

JOSHUA FIALKOV AND CREW TAP INTO THE DARKER SIDE OF THE WILD, WILD WEST By Bon Alimagno

For every high quality indie comics anthology like *Western Tales of Terror*, there's a half-dozen featuring talent "not ready for primetime." That doesn't mean they have no business doing comics, just that they still have a very long way to go before they're ready for wide readership.

Which is what makes the high quality of *Tales* such a treat, and the man behind it, Joshua Fialkov, one to watch in the years ahead. Fialkov, editor of the series, started the project after years of frustration in the television and film industries. "I wanted to find an alternative way to express myself. That's when it all clicked. Comics are the perfect blend. Limitless budget, endless possibilities, and accessible enough to any creator with the right amount of drive and determination." When asked how he was able to get people like Steve Niles and Tony Moore to contribute to the first issue of an unknown series, Fialkov says simply, "I've got a lot of really cool friends." He had worked his way into the Los Angeles comics scene through his webcomics, making friends and finding fans along the way. "Most of my friends who were pros knew that I wanted to be doing mainstream comics and offered all kinds of support. So, when the idea to put together an anthology came up, I just made a few calls."

He and his publisher Hoarse and Buggy also set up a submission process at their website (http://www.westerntalesofterror.com) gathering together some of the best unknown talent. "There are some massively talented people out there who aren't 'name' people. For us, having the chance to be their first published work is a huge, huge coup."

The end result is a first issue of six stories tackling the unique marriage of horror and western genres. "The Old West, to me, was sort of like this blank canvas. We knew nothing about what was out here, and the culture of the Native Americans was so rife with spirituality and the supernatural as well...

"The Old West was a scary place. You spent your life terrified that you'd step on some asshole's shoe, and he'd kill you for it." The first issues feel gritty and dusty, as if the stories contained within them had just been unearthed after being long forgotten. What can be expected from future issues, featuring the likes of Phil Hester, Ryan Ottley and Jay Faerber? "More revenge, zombies, gunfighters, man-eating-insects and a whole smattering of whores. That's what comics are all about, right?"

The first two issues of *Tales* are available now with the third in stores this month.

ART BY (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) SCOTT KEATING, DEREK FRIDOLFS, SCOTT KEATING, AZAD, TONY MOORE & SCOTT KEATING

SILENT PARTNER

GREG SCOTT'S TRIED TO KEEP A LOW PROFILE, BUT HIS ART BEGS TO BE NOTICED. By Bon Alimagno

Scott's style is a blend of hyper-detailed realism and gritty noir that was perfect for *Sword of Dracula*.

Haven't heard much from Greg Scott before? The artist of this issue's *Sword of Dracula/Vampirella* hasn't given many interviews. Indeed, this may be his first.

According to *Sword* creator and writer Jason Henderson, Scott played the "silent drummer" of the creative team, electing to stay in the background. The work speaks for itself. Perfect for horror and crime noir (he's already got *Gotham Central* on his resume and will soon be adding *Sam & Twitch*), Scott's distinctive, hyper-realistic work made *Sword* a standout series.

How did you break into comics?

It's one of those Cinderella stories I guess. Actually, I hadn't drawn for ten, fifteen years but I had a little sketchbook and I was just messing with it, I went into Neal Adams' studio in Manhattan and showed him my stuff and he gave me this talk for three hours. It was like boot camp. I really didn't know anything about comics, but what I know I can say I learned from Neal. He would put together these impromptu tutorials about how to draw a car tire and how to draw the molding on a window — things that most artists don't pay attention to. Neil just pounded into me: The sum total of what makes something good is the detail.

How did you approach working on Sword of Dracula/Vampirella?

I just thought, who would I like to see her as and she was very Monica Bellucci-esque. Other than that it was just going around Manhattan with my digital camera: I went to Grand Central, I went to the West Side Highway, I went up on a building for that one down shot.

How did you get hooked up with Jason Henderson and Sword of Dracula?

Jason was doing a Chinese ghost story for Moonstone and I started to do it, but it was period stuff. It was so much research and I tend to get really, REALLY bogged down in the period stuff. It was just driving me nuts. I kind of said to Jason, 'I can't do this.' He said, 'I got this thing called *Sword of Dracula*' and he sent me the script and I thought "I could play with this."

What's it like getting greater name recognition?

It's nice because when I call and say who I am, people don't go "Huh?" I pretty much work in a vacuum. I don't go to comic shops, I don't really pick up too many comics except certain artists that I follow. I'm just starting to feel that all the hard work is paying off now. So I guess that's — I don't think I really am much of a big name.

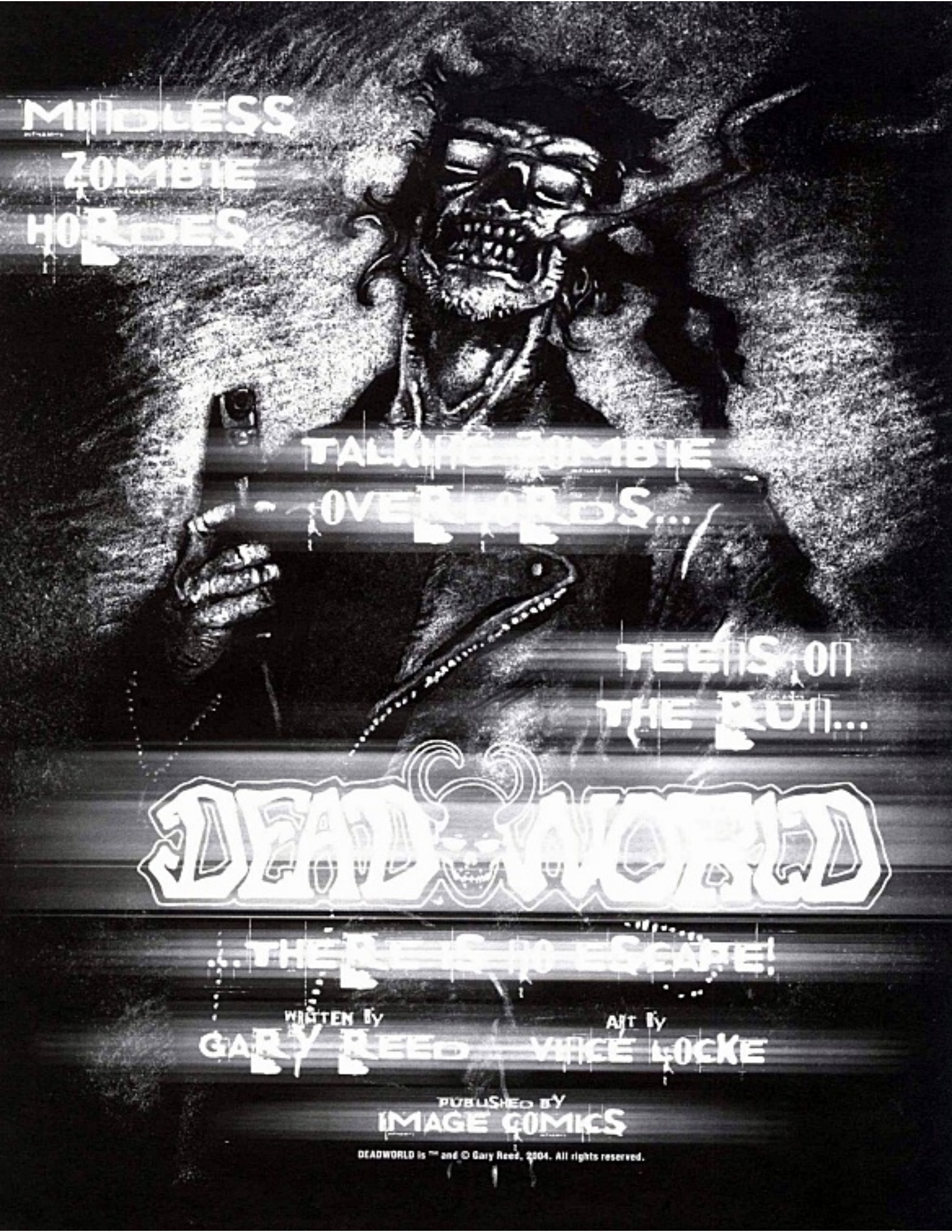
What was it like with Greg Rucka and Ed Brubaker on Gotham Central?

Totally different working with them. It's kind of a sterile experience because there's no feedback between you and writers at all. It's just like, 'Here, you do it,' and then just hand it in. Which is perfectly fine, that's a professional sort of arrangement. While we were working on this Vampirella story, Jason and I — we'd talk to each other everyday. It's very satisfying. You want to make the best story and it was kind of frustrating working with other companies.

Any last words?

I'm just happy to be here. I get up everyday and I say thank you because the alternative is bar tending. When you're lucky enough to be doing what you like, look over your shoulder 'cause there's a line of people who are ready to step into your place.

ALL ART BY GREG SCOTT



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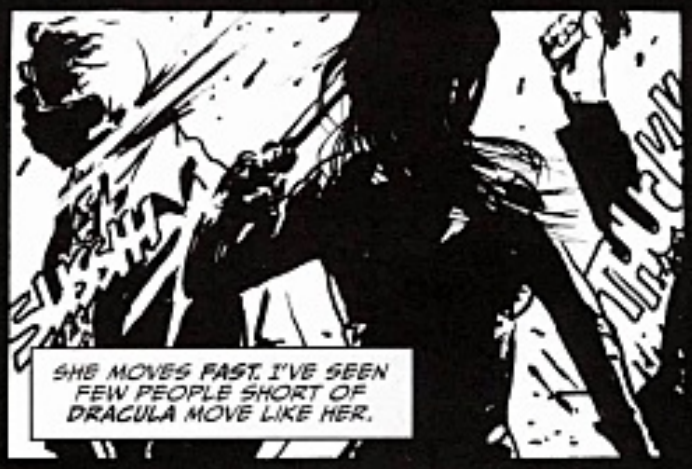
VAMPIRELLA/SWORD OF DRACULA: WITNESS, PART II



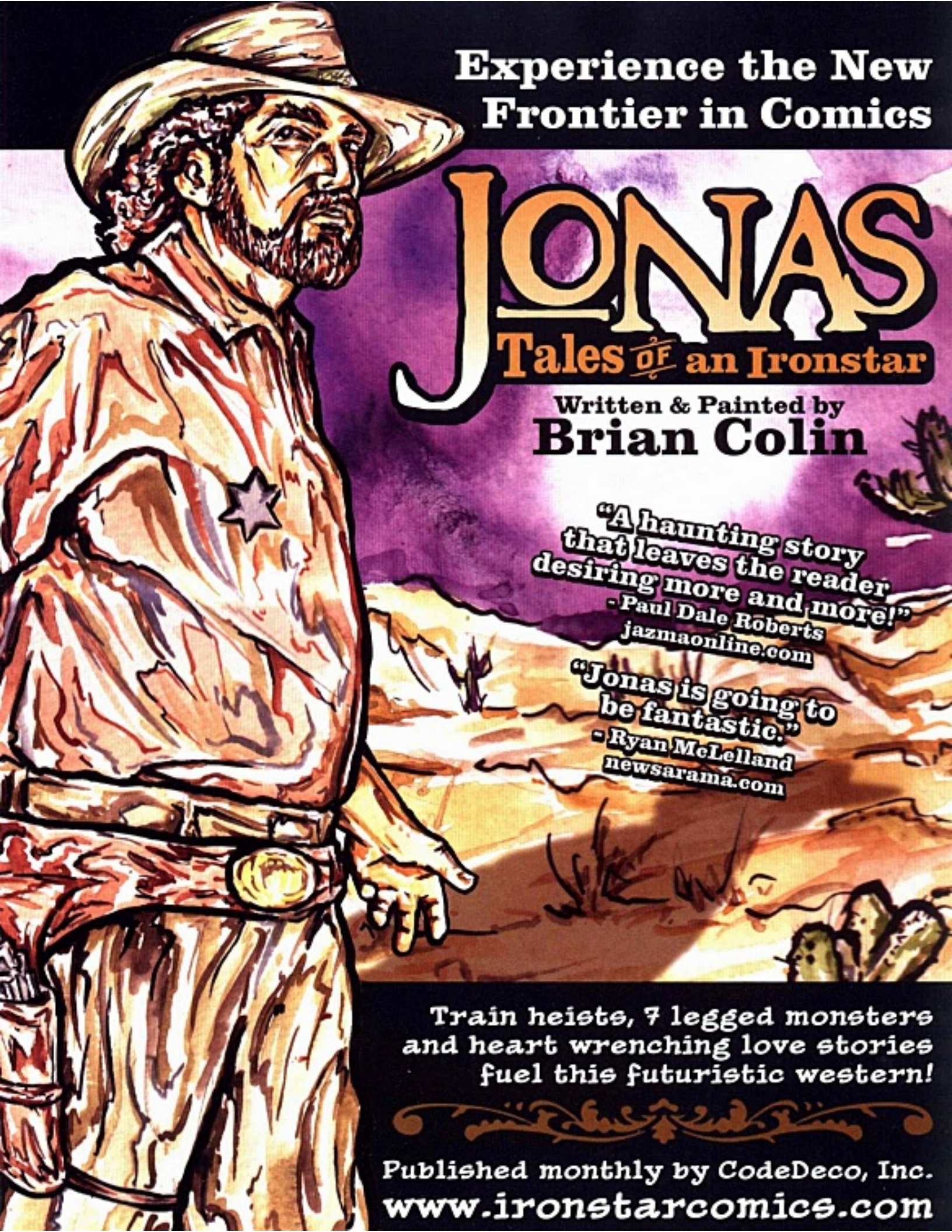
STORY: JASON HENDERSON
ART: GREG SCOTT
LETTERS: ED DUKESHIRE

SHE GOES THROUGH THESE THUGS LIKE A THEY'RE NOTHING-- IT'S THE POWER OF A VAMPIRE.
SHE CAN BEAT YOUR ASS WHILE YOUR MIND TURNS TO MUSH IN HER PRESENCE.
YOU MUST BE JOKING.
WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?
JUST A GIRL WITH SOME LONG KNIVES AND A BUSTED BIKE.
YOU'VE LOST A GREAT DEAL OF BLOOD--
--HERE--
LET ME HELP YOU.
SLKK
BAM
OKAY.
DROP IT, ELLA. NO JOKE, DO IT NOW--
--OR THERE'S NOTHING LEFT OF YOU BUT BUNCH OF DUST AND A SOUND I LIKE TO SPELL "FWOOSH!"
WITH *LEAD*, RONNIE?
GIMME A *BREAK*.
SILVER-JACKETED HAWTHORN BULLETS.

RONNIE, IF THIS IS ABOUT THE *RUG*, I SAID I WAS SORRY.
...
I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU'RE *TALKING* ABOUT, ELLA. NOW WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
I'M HERE FOR FREDDY THE TOOTH.
YEAH, AND I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW MUCH *THAT'S* NOT GONNA HAPPEN.
WHO'S THIS?
WHAT?
WHO'S THIS YOU'RE WORKING WITH? THIS IS A HIGHER CLASS OF MAN FOR YOU THAN I RECALL.
YOU DON'T KNOW THE HALF OF IT, SISTER.
A HIGHER *CLASS?* WHO THE HELL--
WE REALLY NEEDN'T FIGHT.
VERONICA MAY BE A DIFFICULT LADY, BUT I CAN TELL BY YOUR EYES--
--YOU'RE A SENSITIVE MAN.
SIGH--
--EXCUSE ME?

...
SORRY. NOT GONNA HAPPEN, SISTER.
THAT'S SOME STRONG MOJO, THOUGH. THAT WAS PRIMO.
WELL--
--I WAS AFRAID OF THAT.
PROBLEM WITH VAMPIRES.
TEK
BAROOM
THEY CAN HANDLE A CONCUSSIVE BLAST A LOT BETTER THAN WE CAN. SHE SET THIS UP, WHICH ACTUALLY MAKES ME GLAD THAT SHE DIDN'T EXPECT ABE TO FALL FOR HER VAMPIRE... HPYNOTISM.
ABE-- @*$@*!, SHE'S GOT FREDDY!
I WAS TOLD I WOULDN'T BE CHAINED...
YOU REALLY ARE THE WHINIEST VAMPIRE EVER, AREN'T YOU?

IT TAKES ME AT LEAST A MINUTE TO STEAL A CAR--SOMETHING I HAVEN'T DONE SINCE ONE OF MY SISTER'S IDIOTIC DARES IN JUNIOR HIGH.
ELLA IS NONE TOO EASY ON FREDDY THE TOOTH.
I FOLLOW THEM TO THE RENDEZVOUS. WHAT FREDDY DOESN'T KNOW IS THE COLLAR WE PUT ON HIM IS WIRED WITH, AMONG OTHER THINGS, A HOMING DEVICE--AND A BUG.
I HEAR ELLA SAY:
SO YOU HAVE YOUR MAN. WHERE IS THE LITTLE GIRL?
AND THEY'RE PUTTING A SMALL FEMALE INTO VAMPIRELLA'S ARMS.
SO THAT'S IT. SHE'S JUST HANDED FREDDY BACK TO HIS OWN PEOPLE IN EXCHANGE FOR A PRISONER. I WONDER WHO THE GIRL BELONGS TO.
GUESS THIS IS THE DAY WITNESS PROTECTION RUNS OUT, HUH, FREDDY?
AS THE BIKE REVS I WONDER WHO THE GIRL BELONGS TO. I CAN ONLY ASSUME VAMPIRELLA'S OFF TO DELIVER HER TO HER FAMILY.
TIK
KRUMF
NOW, AS REASONS FOR STEALING MY WITNESS GO--THAT'S PRETTY GOOD.
I FLIP A SWITCH AND THE BOMB IN FREDDY'S COLLAR EXPLODES, AND SAVES HIM A FEW DAYS OF TORTURE. SERVICES RENDERED.
SO LONG, TOOTH.
End.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Art from *Aleister Arcane*

GLOOM AND DOOM

MEET BREEHN BURNS, HORROR COMICS' NEXT BIG THING

By Timothy Paulison

Lex from *Gloom Cookie*

A relative newcomer to comics, Breehn Burns has worked incessantly to establish himself as a top level illustrator of all things dark and macabre. When you consider that his first work in comics was on the cult favorite *Gloom Cookie* published by Slave Labor Graphics, which he followed with two projects with horror phenomenon Steve Niles, you'd be hard pressed to argue that people are noticing him for being just that.

With a background in film, Breehn's break into comics actually came from an animated film he did. Having just moved to LA, "I got a call from Serena Valentino, who I had met at the San Diego Comic-Con a couple of times and she had just seen my film. She said, 'Would you be open to illustrating *Gloom Cookie* ?' And I just jumped on it." Any apprehension about taking over a title with such a devoted following was quickly overshadowed by the realization that his first issue would be part two of an arc started by previous *Gloom Cookie* artist, John Gebbia. Burns admits to being "a little concerned about it at first. I was looking at it thinking, oh boy, this is part two and it literally picks up, like, the next panel from the previous issue and I've got characters drawn different ways [with] practically different hairstyles, outfits..." Trying to give a personal touch to the book while not disenfranchising the book's fans, Burns looked to the originator of *Gloom Cookie's* look, Ted Naifeh, for inspiration. "I was able, I think, to summon the look [readers] had gotten used to with the first few issues."

Burn's fascination with horror came at an early age. He recalls growing up as a child whose birthday falls in October. "We always used to have Halloween costume parties and I just grew up with this natural 'this is the best time of the year' kind of feeling." As an illustrator, this fascination took new form as a cre-

Cal MacDonald's back in a paperback with cover art by Burns

Andy's gotten into a little trouble in *Aleister Arcane*

"I SHOWED [STEVE NILES] MY STUFF AND SAID, IF YOU NEED ANYONE WHO LIKES TO DRAW HORROR ILLUSTRATIONS...."

NOT LONG THEREAFTER, NILES OFFERED BURNS *Aleister Arcane.*

ative outlet. "[Art] is just light hitting a surface and that is what kind of excites me about it. And with horror, the lighting is more dramatic. You can get a better lighting effect, you know, the atmosphere, the mood, the emotions, the sort of ominous nature of horror comics."

While working on *Gloom Cookie*, Burns was well aware of Steve Niles' work and a fan of *30 Days of Night*. Approaching Niles at a convention, "I showed him my stuff and said, if you need anyone who likes to draw horror illustrations, I dig it and would love to work with you." A few days later Burns was approached to contribute to *Dial M for Monster*, a collection of stories featuring Cal McDonald, a private eye who deals with the real freaks and ghouls of Los Angeles. Not long thereafter, Niles offered Burns *Aleister Arcane*.

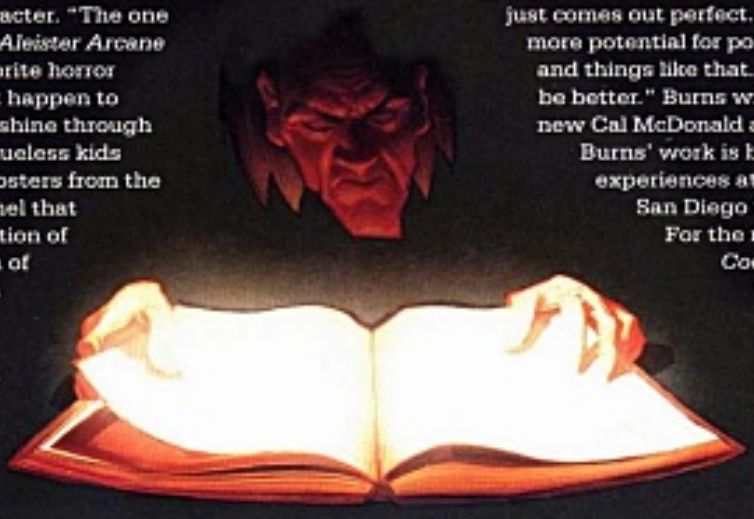
A story of a late night TV creature feature show host whose life begins to imitate the art he so dearly loves, Burns prepared for this book by immersing himself into the life and passions of its title character. "The one thing I did when I agreed to do *Aleister Arcane* was I started buying all my favorite horror movies, whichever ones I didn't happen to own." A touch of horror's roots shine through in the first issue as a group of clueless kids stare wide-eyed at props and posters from the genre's extensive past. One panel that stands out is a full-length depiction of Lon Chaney Sr. as The Phantom of the Opera that looks like he can reach out of the page and grab your hand.

It is these personal touches, these minor additions that can almost distract from the plot but still pull you deep into the page. The reader becomes more absorbed in the atmosphere, creating the feeling of observing, not from outside, but from within.

According to Burns, working on a monthly with *Gloom Cookie* did provide him a bit more freedom in making suggestions. "Well, Serena definitely had everything in her head. I would occasionally mention to her that I really like something in particular and she might focus on that. I would say, 'Hey, I want to draw a lot of little demons.' And she'd say, 'Well, we can make that part of the next issue.' Steve [Niles] had the story set up long in advance. He would occasionally say, 'What do you think of this idea? What do you think of that idea?' But my input was probably mainly things like design of the monsters."

When talking about future comic projects, Burns remains fairly tight-lipped, but adds that he hopes to continue working with IDW. "I've been completely spoiled working with IDW because the quality of their books is so high. And especially with the type of full color process with all the subtleties I try to use, it just comes out perfect. [With color] there's 150 percent more potential for possibilities in atmosphere and mood and things like that. I can't imagine the printing could be better." Burns will also be working with Niles on a new Cal McDonald anthology for IDW in the future.

Burns' work is bearing fruit, as illustrated by his experiences at the Comic-Con International in San Diego this year. "Oh, this year was great. For the most part it would be a *Gloom Cookie* fan or an *Aleister* fan or something like that. This year we actually had people who knew about a few of them or all of them which completely blew my mind. Having people know that I worked on more than one project is a very flattering thing."



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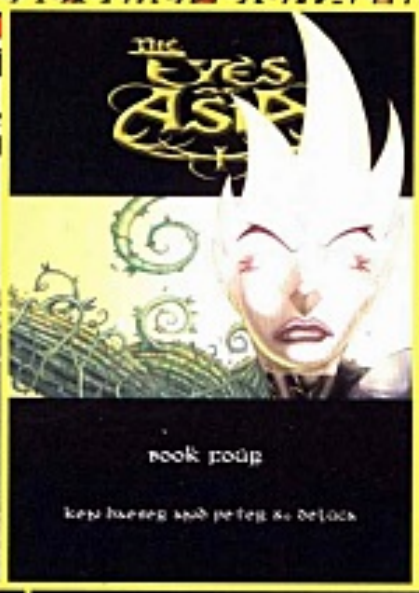

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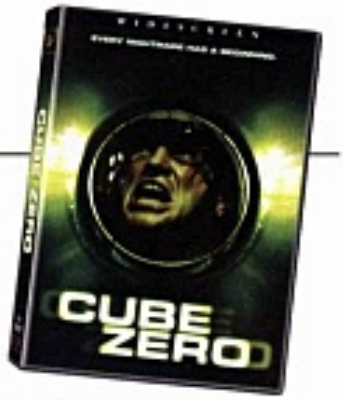

PANIC ROOMS

ACID SHOWERS, SENSORY EXPLOSIONS AND MATH: YEP, IT'S ANOTHER CUBE MOVIE.

The greatest horror known to man could be math! Or authority. Or maybe an acid shower…

You wake up, not knowing where you are, or even perhaps, who you are. You don't know what to do, where to go, how to get out. You move to what looks like a door and it opens, and one of you goes through to the other side… where you find another room exactly like the one you just left only… the first one in doesn't make it out. At least not in one piece.

The nitty-gritty, down-and-dirty aspect of the *Cube* movies, three to date, cover two aspects: grasping the math that maps out the cube system, the code the lab rats have to figure out to escape, and the gruesome traps unleashed when one of the poor victims enters the wrong cube. The original *Cube*, created by Vincenzo Natali, had an intricate mapping code… and some bloody, bloody deaths, a nice mix for writer/director Ernie Barbarash to emulate in the third flick, the prequel *Cube Zero*. (Barbarash apologizes. "And I unfortunately co-wrote *HyperCube*, too," the second *Cube* movie which he also produced.)

Cube Zero features even more gory booby traps.

After wrapping up *HyperCube*, Barbarash realized he had an idea, and Lions Gate Films gave him the go ahead to write and direct. "It's not like I went in and said, 'Oh, I want to make *Cube* movies my whole life,' but I had a good idea of how to do it. I was born in what used to be the Soviet Union, and inside me there's always the question of how does authority affect people. How does the psychology of authority, the totalitarian regimes, really work? The interest in those kind of questions brought about the *Cube Zero* film we have now."

Besides the blood and gore the *Cube* films have the math connection. "Here's the thing," says Barbarash, "I found it takes a LONG time to work out math puzzles in films. But the audience, you really don't want them to be ahead of you. And a LOT of them are *really* smart, the people who go after these films are really into this sort of thing. I think Vincenzo's original map idea, the code with the prime numbers, was great. So the good news is that because it's a prequel, I almost thought, 'You know, I don't have to top that because if this is a Cube that was built before that first Cube, well, their math wasn't as good."

—"We tried new stuff like the guy melting in that acidic liquid…"

Being the "first" movie, Barbarash was able to literally think outside the box. With his producer background he was able to make the most of his limited set and budget and time. "I think I felt because it was the third *Cube* film, I felt free to go outside the Cube. I tried not to go outside too much because that would be false to the mythology that Vincenzo created, that you really are in one space.

The key to the cube is to avoid dying. The rooms are set with either nothing to fear or with hideous death. And *Cube Zero*'s opening death is oh, so good. "You gotta start the movie with something really interesting," the director says of that first look into the cube, "instead of a slower burn and opting for something at the end because we wanted to hook people in."

"Something that people responded to in *Cube*," he says, was that there were these visceral, physical, sort of dirty traps, and so we tried to come up with some new stuff like the guy melting in that acidic liquid in the beginning and harken back. In the end, when they keep throwing the boot over and over and different things happen to it, that was almost a medley, a running gag of Vincenzo's old traps that said it's part of that same world. On some level, I wish I had come up with some even cooler traps for the end because like the first *Cube* film, the coolest trap happened in the first 30 seconds when the guy got sliced and diced and we almost suffer the same fate in that the first trap is the coolest trap. And the fans of the film like some gory stuff."

Barbarash is clearly excited about what he put together. "In the middle of the story, when Meyerhold [Mike Nahrgang] gets blown apart by sound, that was fun to do! His agent sent me a note, because I had lent them my DVD to get some scenes for his reel, saying 'Thanks. It's not every day when you get to include a scene where your client's head blows up'."

Cube Zero certainly has something for everyone.

—*Maureen McTigue*

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY LIONS GATE FILMS

Think he'll do it?
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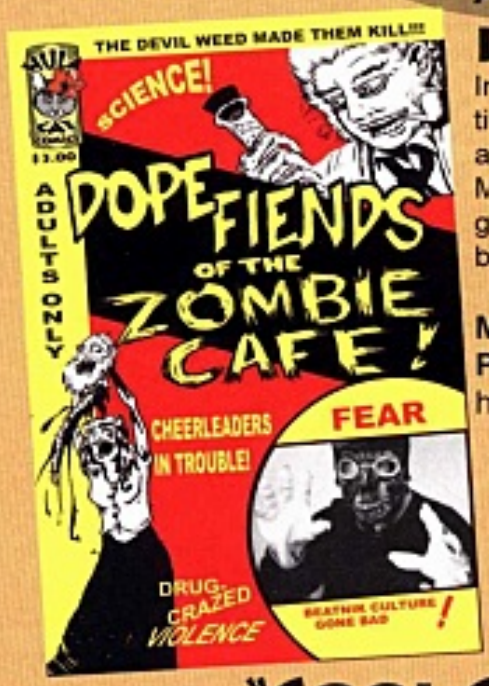

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In Dope Fiends of the Zombie Cafe, an experimental, radioactive preservative leaks into Centerville's marijuana crop, initiating the human testing phase ahead of schedule. High school pinball champ Tommy and his best gal Betty Marie must battle beatnik zombies, poetry readings, and mad science. (Suggested for mature readers due to language, graphic violence, and one really bad toupee.)

Michael May of **Comic World News** says: "The book is hilarious. **PLASTIC FARM**'s Rafer Roberts supplies the art and it's obvious that he's enjoying this every bit as much as writer Sean Frost is."

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LUNACHICKS

WHEN THE MOON IS FULL THEY RISE

Stacy Walker

Bringing Fantasy To Life

Talk to any artist who's painted Stacy Walker: this woman's something special. Alex Horley, who has used her as a model for two Vampirella covers, has said, "On first sight, I knew I just had to paint her." So what's her secret? What's made her the model for countless covers and fantasy art pieces? "It's more than just good looks," says Stacy, "I have the ability to look strong yet soft, give tons of attitude and then turn around and be quite vulnerable. It has to really come from within."

V: What turns you on, both professionally and personally?

SW: There is nothing more exciting then when an artist contacts you to pose for an original piece they have created just for you. Some of the artists and even the fans have told me they feel that the pieces that feature my image have turned out to be their best work.

V: What effect do you want to have on your audience?

SW: My main goal from the start was not to just be just another pretty girl in the crowd trying to make a quick buck off of my image alone. When people discover my work I like them to feel inspired and provide a sense of adventure that goes beyond just a physical reaction. They look at me like they just can't believe I am real. They want to believe I run around in chain-mail, slaying monsters, and that is fine with me.

V: Could you describe your experiences making the Vampirella covers with Alex Horley?

SW: Working with Alex has really added an entire new dimension to my work. We hit it off the first time we met professionally as well as personally. We share a passion for so many of the same things and that has really added to the success of our work together.

V: Define "SEXY."

SW: There is nothing sexier than being able to love yourself, to be self-confident and yet not arrogant. Being able to laugh at yourself. Never care what others think. Believing in yourself enough to go after all your dreams and desires. Having long dark hair and a sort of scruffy style of whiskers is not bad either! —*BA*

"They look at me like they just can't believe I am real."

Many women have vied for the Scream Queen crown at conventions, on Halloween, for photo shoots, for the Hell of it—it's been done time and again, with and without the prodding of others. Every month, you can meet one of these women who take their fandom to the next level. If you know of one, share. Send all packages to: LUNACHICKS, Vampirella Comics Magazine: 1115 Broadway, 8th floor, New York, NY 10010

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